WIDOWHOOD: THE ROLE OF PASTORAL CARE IN ESTABLISHING A COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT

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ABSTRACT

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The ministry context is Kingdom Come Ministries in Clairton, Pennsylvania. This project addressed the limited awareness of the widows' ongoing needs. If ministry leadership participated in workshops about what it means to be a widow, then they would become more sensitive (aware) to the needs of those members who are widows. The project lasted for six weeks, and qualitative research methods were used to assess the validity of the hypothesis. Group discussions, pre- and post-questionnaires, observations, and reflective journaling were employed to gather and analyze data. Analysis revealed that leaders' awareness, sensitivity, and understanding of widows' needs increased.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I give God all the glory, honor, and praise for gracing me with the ability and strength to complete this doctoral journey. I would not have pursued this academic work or made it through without His guidance and faithfulness. The Lord divinely ordered my steps, and He began this good work, and He enabled me to complete it.

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I am especially grateful for each of my professional associates who unselfishly committed their time and shared their wisdom and unique expertise. First, I acknowledge Rev. Dr. Lora R. Hubbard, who God used to reignite my interest in pursuing doctoral studies. From my early deliberations through the completion of the program, I am forever thankful for her encouragement, guidance, and consistent support. I acknowledge that Dr. Mark J. Chironna was also instrumental in confirming my doctoral quest, and his

scholarly perspective and invaluable insights significantly enriched the depth of my research. I also offer my sincere appreciation to Dr. Brandy L. McKinney, who provided me with valuable clinical acumen, academic resources, inspiration, and motivation. The combined investment of my professional associates enhanced my scholarly work and strengthened my personal resolve in profound ways for which I am perpetually grateful. In addition, I am thankful for my context associates, Deaconess Bernadette Holly, Leiah Clifford, and Elder Paulette Williams, who played essential roles as reviewers and assisted during the project implementation.

Finally, I am beholden to my Pastor, church family, and friends for their prayers, kindness, and steadfast presence that sustained me through the most difficult and challenging days of my doctoral pursuit.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the widows whose lives, losses, and resilience inspired this research. It is their unheard voices and stories, carried in silence, that convey profound grief and extraordinary strength. I hope this work honors their experiences and contributes to greater awareness, compassion, and meaningful support within communities of faith. To those who walk alongside grieving widows, I pray this research encourages greater commitment, understanding, and empathy. May this research lead to continued learning, advocacy, and faithful actions on behalf of those who mourn the loss of their husband.

I also dedicate this dissertation to the cherished memory of my loving parents, Harry and Maxine Robinson. To my mother, whose unconditional love, prayers, and unfaltering belief in me sustained me throughout this doctoral journey, up until the day of her passing. This work is a tribute to the faith in God and perseverance she instilled in me. To my father, who departed this life before I earned my first degree, yet his example laid the foundation for my educational pursuits – I honor his legacy through this achievement. I further dedicate this work to my brother and Pastor, Jonathan Robinson, whose support and encouragement cheered me forward at every stage of this journey.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to all my nieces and nephews. May this work serve as a reminder that perseverance, faith, and commitment can carry you through life's challenges, and may it inspire you to pursue your own dreams with courage and purpose.

Above all, this dedication is offered in gratitude to God, whose presence sustains the brokenhearted and whose call to care for the vulnerable continues to shape this study and my life's work.

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ABBREVIATIONS

DSM-5 TR	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Text Revision 5
KCM	Kingdom Come Ministries
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NSRC	New Spirit Revival Center
OIC	Opportunity Industrial Center
PGD	Prolonged Grief Disorder
WEMA	Women's Educational Mentoring Alliance

“When you lose a parent, you lose your past; when you lose a child, you lose your future; when you lose a spouse, you lose yourself.”

—Author Unknown

INTRODUCTION

The loss of a spouse has long been regarded as the most stressful event of a lifetime and marks a turning point and major milestone in the life of the surviving partner.[1] Widowhood is a multifaceted experience that disproportionally affects a widow emotionally, socially, and economically. A widow's loss is compounded by concerns about her personal welfare or the welfare of her children. Her needs are not just complicated based on gender, but race and class are other relevant factors that exacerbate their grief and the bereavement process. According to the U. S. Census Bureau's March 2022 estimates, there are over eleven million widows in the United States, and there are 2800 married women who will become widowed every day.[2] In the city where my context is located, widows represent 10.8% of the population, and grief support of any kind is nonexistent in the community or the church.

The Old and New Testaments are replete with scriptures that reveal God's compassion and concern for widows. Evidence of care and support in our religious institutions and communities today is as scarce as it was in the scriptures. Leaders then and now have been negligent in fulfilling their God-given mandate regarding widows.

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[1] Anoushka D. Shahane, Ryan L. Brown, Bryan T. Denny, Christopher P. Fagundes, "Lexical Markers of Cognitive Reappraisal, Bereavement, and Proinflammatory Cytokine Production," *Health Psychology* 42, no. 1 (Jan 2023): 24-32, https://doi.org/10.1037/hea0001207.

[2] Modern Widows Club, "MWC Impact Report 2011-2020," Modern Widows Club, https://modernwidowsclub.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/mwc_impact_report_2011-2020_editjul21.pdf.

The problem identified in my context is an unawareness of the ongoing needs of widows. I hypothesize if ministry leadership participates in a workshop about what it means to be a widow, then they will become more (sensitive) aware of the needs of those members who are widows. This research project focuses on Widowhood: The Role of Pastoral Care in Establishing a Community of Support.

Chapter One, Ministry Focus, describes my ministry journey, ministry context, personal lived experiences as a widow, and the impetus that engendered this doctoral study on widows in the church. My desire to alleviate some aspects of the pain widows suffer, my passion for seeing others maximize their potential, my educational background in training, and my context form a symbiotic relationship.

Through many traumatic experiences as a widow, I heard the call of Isaiah 1:17 in Chapter Two, and I became that advocate seeking justice, pleading the case of the widow. Married for a short period, suffering multiple losses, and finding comfort in God, I identify with the historical figure in Chapter Three. The absence of a support system accentuates the importance of the widow's community, as detailed in Chapter Four. After several years of persistent grief and struggling with feelings of isolation, I relate to the effects and symptoms of prolonged grief disorder outlined in Chapter Five. A holistic approach that includes a biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary view of widowhood is essential to leaders grasping what it means to be a widow. The underpinnings of this project are found in the following four foundational chapters.

In Chapter Two, the biblical foundation scripture is based on Isaiah 1:17, which in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) reads: "Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow." The prophet, Isaiah, in

this passage of scripture, emphasizes God's divine mandate to protect and care for widows and other marginalized populations. The plight of widows in a patriarchal society placed them in a precarious situation socially and financially. The leaders were specifically charged with widows' well-being and with advocating on their behalf. Relative to the ministry project, key elements are educating leaders, increasing sensitivity and awareness, and their advocacy role in establishing a community of support. The verbs in this verse, learn, seek, defend, rescue, and plead, underscore actionable steps essential to supporting widows. Chapter Three integrates the biblical mandate in Isaiah 1:17 with a historical example of widowhood whose faith and tenacity helped her overcome her suffering and grief.

Chapter Three, the historical foundation for this project, centers on the life of Princess Joanna of Austria, a sixteenth-century widow regarded as the only female in history to live and die as a member of the Jesuits.[3] She gravitated to the Jesuits because they emphasized education and charitable work for the marginalized. After experiencing the death of her husband and several other losses in quick succession, she eventually found solace in religion. Joanna elected to dedicate the remainder of her life to serving others. Joanna's advocacy for the vulnerable and the establishment of the Our Lady of the Consolation convent for women complement the biblical foundational scripture (Isa. 1:17). Her experience with widowhood and her relationship with one of the founding members of the Jesuits affirm the importance of pastoral care and social support relative to the ministry context. The next chapter builds on the significant role that

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[3] Thomas Worcester, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 430–431, https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=5046548.

pastoral care, and a social support system play in the care of widows, utilizing the early church as a model.

Chapter Four, Theological Foundations, examines the tenets of Womanist Theology, its founders, and its history. It takes a womanist view, considering the communion of the saints, of pastoral care for widows. Research on womanist and the communion of the saints in support of widows is limited; therefore, limitations of Feminist Theology in the African American context are also viewed through the lens of pioneers in Black Liberation and Womanist Theology. The communal nature of the early church and the Order of Widows provide a blueprint for forming an effective community of support. Widows found purpose, felt a sense of belonging in the company of women with whom they shared life experiences. The next chapter examines secular science and widowhood.

Chapter Five, the interdisciplinary foundation chapter, looks at the field of psychology, specifically Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD), its effects, and implications on widows. PGD is estimated to affect 7% to 10% of people mourning the death of a loved one.[4] Mental health, pathology, and the validated scales used to solidify the criteria for PGD are examined along with the evolution from complicated grief, persistent complex bereavement disorder, to the official diagnosis of Prolonged Grief Disorder. The new criteria for PGD approved by The American Psychiatric Association, included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Text Revision 5 (DSM-5-TR)[5] is

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[4] Kristin L. Szuhany, et al., "Prolonged Grief Disorder: Course, Diagnosis, Assessment, and Treatment.," *FOCUS, The Journal of Lifelong Learning In Psychiatry* 19, no. 2 (June 19, 2021): 161–172, https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.focus.20200052.

[5] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Text Revision*, 5th ed. (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2022), 322.

detailed. Prolonged grief disorder aligns well with my project, and it sheds light on the reasons why the bereavement process can linger. The psychology of PGD integrates with all the foundational chapters.

The biblical (Isa. 1:17) promotes providing for the widows. The story of Naomi in chapter one of the book of Ruth accentuates the effects of multiple losses. Naomi's life is the personification of a widow who would, in our contemporary times, embody the reasons for PGD. She is an example of a widow who suffered the devastating effects of compounded tragedies, complicated circumstances, and profound grief. A psychological view of this biblical narrative, coupled with the research behind PGD, would make Naomi a high risk for PGD. Naomi's life in light of PGD provides insight into how incorporating science with faith may have possibly mitigated some of the psychological effects of widowhood.

The psychology of PGD aligns with the historical foundation chapter, which chronicles multiple generations of widows in Princess Joanna's family who manifested mental and emotional signs that today would meet the criteria for PGD. The Theological Foundations chapter examined the communion of the saints in the first-century New Testament church and the womanist theology. From the standpoint of PGD, the early churches' communal nature and the order of widows met the widow's practical, spiritual, mental, and emotional needs. This holistic approach addressed the ongoing needs of widows. This model reinforces why understanding the ongoing needs of widows is essential and the benefits of having a community of support. A comprehensive approach to the project will be devised based on the insights gleaned from this holistic approach,

which will be reflected in the project when implemented. The outcomes of the project will be documented in the next chapter.

Chapter Six outlines the elements of the sessions held during the two-day workshops held on July 19 and August 19, 2025. The project analysis describes the methodology, presents a compilation of qualitative and quantitative results, and provides a summary of outcomes, successes, areas for improvement, overall effectiveness, gaps, and potential topics for future research. The hypothesis was also reexamined and found to be supported by these outcomes. This introduction provided a high-level overview of my ministry project and its foundational framework. Chapter One, Ministry Focus, presents detailed information regarding my ministry context, my qualifications, and my lived experiences as a widow.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The purpose of this synergy chapter is to describe how my ministry interests and skills relate to the needs of my context. The integration of the needs of my context, my ministry journey, and my personal life experiences influenced my choice to focus on the widows in the church. The topic of my doctoral project and how it was derived based on the relationship between my context, ministry interests, and skills will be discussed. Lastly, this chapter will also include a problem statement, hypothesis, and a proposed implementation plan.

Context

My context is Kingdom Come Ministries (KCM), a non-denominational church located at 241 Maple Avenue in Clairton, Pennsylvania. The church was founded by Senior Pastor, Jonathan H. Robinson, a lifelong Clairton resident. In 2000, Pastor Robinson began teaching a Bible Study in his home with his immediate family and five other individuals. Kingdom Come Ministries held its inaugural service on May 20, 2001. The 501(c)(3) non-profit status application was filed in August 2001, and the church was incorporated in July 2002. Kingdom Come Ministries is a small, predominantly African American congregation with a membership that once peaked at 100. The church is community-oriented and community-based.

Kingdom Come Ministries is one of over twenty churches in the small, urban community of Clairton; and it is the only non-denominational church in the city. Other denominations include Catholic, Baptist, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Methodist, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Serbian Orthodox, Holiness, Assembly of God, and Episcopalian.

As the ministry grew, the church rented space and held worship services in various locations around the city. Services were held at the Croatian Club of Clairton St. George Lodge No. 248 known in the community as "The Cro." The building originally belonged to a Catholic organization and later was owned by the Masonic Lodge. After several years of renting "The Cro," it became available for sale, and Kingdom Come Ministries purchased the property. The building and the land surrounding the building constitute approximately a half-acre of land, according to Pastor Robinson, "The building was an eyesore and in a state of disrepair and needed a complete makeover. The ministry had the building totally gutted, completely renovated, and transformed from a popular dance hall to a beautiful edifice." The official dedication service was held on Sunday, June 26, 2005.

Pastor Robinson is a visionary and key to the development of Kingdom Come Ministries. He was ordained in 1980, and he served in ministry for twenty-seven years before starting the church. His pastorate is unique in that, unlike the other pastors in Clairton who inherited an established church, Pastor Robinson built the ministry from the ground up. My context is located near Route 837 in the Blair district, a few blocks from the main entrance of Clairton's steel mill. The main sanctuary comfortably seats one hundred fifty people, and the lower level has a meeting space that accommodates one

hundred people, office spaces, and a kitchen. The church also owns eleven lots adjacent to the property that stretch from Maple Avenue to Boundary Avenue.

Geographically, Clairton is fifteen minutes south of Pittsburgh in Allegheny County. The county is the second largest of sixty-seven counties in the southwestern part of the state, and it has 130 municipalities. In 2023, the population was 1,258,747, and demographically, Allegheny County was comprised of 51.3% females and 48.6% males. Its racial composition was 78.43% White, 12.68% African American, and 3.94% Asian according to World Population Review.[1]

Clairton was incorporated at the turn of the century in 1903 and is considered a third-class city.[2] The city sits along the Monongahela River, bordering the boroughs of Elizabeth, Glassport, Jefferson Hills, West Elizabeth, and West Mifflin. Clairton is home to United States Steel's largest coke-producing facility in the United States.[3] Once the world's largest Coke producer, Clairton was called the "Coke Capital of the World."[4] It was once a booming mill town with a population that approached 25,000 and, at its peak housed several movie theaters, car dealerships, and grocery stores according to Dr. Andrew Nixon.[5] The decline of the steel industry in the mid-1980s led to Clairton's

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[1] World Population Review Staff, "Population of Counties in Pennsylvania," World Population Review, https://worldpopulationreview.com/states/pennsylvania/counties.

[2] Alchetron, "City of Clairton, Pennsylvania," Alchetron, https://alchetron.com/Clairton%2C-Pennsylvania.

[3] Reid Frazier, "U.S. Steel Closing Three Coke Batteries at its Clairton Plant," State Impact NPR, https://stateimpact.npr.org/pennsylvania/2023/03/15/u-s-steel-closing-3-coke-batteries-at-its- clairton-plant-move-is-expected-to-lower-emissions/.

[4] Mark Hotz, "Clairton National Banks Boom," Numismatic News, https://www.numismaticnews.net/paper-money/clairton-national-banks-boom.

[5] Andrew Nixon, *50 Shades of Grades: Journey Through Wicademia* (Las Vegas, NV: Dr. Forgot LLC, 2013), 2.

designation as a distressed municipality by the Pennsylvania Department of Community Affairs.[6] The designation was eventually rescinded, but the city never recovered from the loss of jobs. Clairton has been a food desert for over a decade. There are no grocery stores, car dealerships, or movie theaters. The city is riddled with dilapidated, abandoned buildings, and boarded-up storefronts.

According to the 2020 United States Census Bureau statistics, the land area in Clairton is 2.77 square miles. The 2020 population per square mile was 2,232.2. The July 2022 population estimate is 6,023.[7] Clairton is a declining city, and more recent data published by World Population Review shows the population in 2023 of 5,948, which is an annual decrease of -1.2% and a -3.55 decrease since the 2020 census, which recorded a population of 6,167. Whites make up 55.2% and African Americans, 41.33%. Females make up 52.07% versus males 47.93%. Of the adults over twenty-five years old, 35.95% graduated from high school, 36.88% have some college, 14.22% have bachelor's degrees, 10.86% have associate degrees, and only 5.94% have a graduate degree. The school district is comprised of 65% Black students and 20% White with 93% of the students being economically disadvantaged and eligible for the federal free and reduced-price meal program.[8]

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[6] Department of Community and Economic Development, "Determination Order City of Clairton," DCED, https://dced.pa.gov/?s=Clairton.

[7] U.S. Census, "Quick Facts," Census Government, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/alleghenycountypennsylvania,clairtoncitypennsylvania/PST045222.

[8] U.S. News and World Report, "Clairton City School District," U. S. News, https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/pennsylvania/districts/clairton-city-sd-102887.

The median household income in Clairton was $37,544, and compared to the $66,659 median household income of other residents in Allegheny County, Clairton's, median household income falls well below the average. The percentage of persons in Clairton living in poverty is 19.51%, which is considerably higher than the 11.3% and 11.8% of those living in poverty in Allegheny County and Pennsylvania, respectively.[9] Females in Clairton living in poverty is 22.52% versus 16.18% for males. The average age is approximately forty-two, and the unemployment rate is 81.82% for females and 18.01% for males.[10] The World Population Review data shows 28.8% of adults in Clairton are seniors, and widowed persons make up a total of 9.4% of the population. 10.8% are females; 10.6% are Black; and 9.1% are White.[11] The membership of my context is primarily comprised of the residents of Clairton, and it is a microcosm of the community at large, except for race.

It is worth noting that 9.4% of the population is widowed. None of the twenty churches or other organizations in Clairton offer grief support of any kind, according to the local funeral homes contacted. This is an unaddressed, overlooked need in a community where the sense of loss is visible all around. Of particular interest, my context has 20% of females who are widows, which is nearly double the average number of female widows in the city.

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[9] City Data, "Clairton, Pennsylvania Poverty Rate Data," City Data, https://www.city-data.com/poverty/poverty-Clairton-Pennsylvania.html.

[10] World Population Review Staff, "Clairton, Pennsylvania Population," World Population Review, https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/clairton-pa-population.

[11] World Population Review Staff, "Clairton, Pennsylvania Population," World Population Review, https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/clairton-pa-population.

One of the strengths of Kingdom Come Ministries, from its inception, has been prayer. The emphasis on prayer is not an accident but has been strategic and intentional. "Welcome to Clairton, The City of Prayer" signs were posted at the city's boundaries in the mid-1960s in response to the Supreme Court's 1963 ban on sponsored school prayer.[12] Pastor Robinson believes a city of prayer begins with a praying church based on the words of Jesus in Matthew 21:13 where He said, "My house shall be called a house of prayer."[13] Another strength of my context is its resilience and history of achieving major ministry initiatives with a few people. Though small in numbers, they have always operated under the guiding principle found in 2 Chronicles 14:11, which states, **"**Perhaps the LORD will help us because it is no more difficult for the Lord to grant victory by means of a few than it is by means of many." The congregants generally take an "all hands" on deck mindset to accomplish their outreach goals.

With limited resources in the church, they have endeavored to remain a beacon of light in a blighted community. Leadership grappling with serving the people realizes that while the mission of the church is the same, the methods pre-pandemic and post-pandemic must take divergent paths**.** While the emphasis remained on the spiritual man, my context established the Empowerment Center as a means of conducting outreach ministry. The goal of the Empowerment Center was to become the ministry's arm that would address the practical needs of the membership and the community. The Empowerment Center's tagline, "Working To Make Change," speaks to its mission to

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[12] NextHome PPM Realty, "Clairton Real Estate," The RP Group Pittsburgh, https://www.therpgrouppgh.com/areas/clairton/pa.

[13] Biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted, Matthew 21:13.

improve the quality of life in this economically depressed community, which is home to many people who have suffered many losses over the years. The community represents a population of people who are grieved, and their needs have gone unnoticed. The years of neglect and lack have been normalized by the community's residents.

Embedded in the population are widows. These women represent 10.8% of the city and approximately 20% in my context, and they have also gone unnoticed. Surprisingly, none of the twenty churches or other organizations in Clairton offer any grief support. I believe meeting the needs of this neglected group is an initiative that will impact the overall mental health and quality of life of the widows in my context, the community, and the surrounding area**s**.

Ministry Journey

I grew up in Clairton, a small but thriving steel town in western Pennsylvania. I was born into the Christian home of my parents, Harry and Maxine Robinson. My father served in World War II and used the GI Bill to attend Virginia Union; he was the first in his family to graduate from college. My father was employed as a social worker at the Pennsylvania Department of Public Assistance and served as the first Executive Director of the Opportunity Industrial Center (OIC) in McKeesport, Pennsylvania. My mother was born in Troy, Alabama, and my grandfather, in search of work and to escape the Jim Crow South, relocated the family to Clairton. My mother was a stay-at-home Mom until later in life. She became a licensed practical nurse. My two brothers were the third generation in our family to work in the local steel mills.

My mother was Pentecostal and a woman of prayer. Prayer at our house was normal and occurred regularly. It was not unusual to hear my mother and her friends praying and testifying to answered prayers. My maternal grandparents, who played a central role in my upbringing, were members of the First AME church near our house. On any given Sunday, I would attend either the Methodist or the Pentecostal church. This experience exposed me to worship formations at both ends of the Protestant continuum. The Methodist church was filled with rituals such as a responsive reading of the Apostles Creed, hymns, and the doxology. At the other end of the spectrum, worship at the Pentecostal church was spontaneous and unscripted, with singing, clapping, tongue talking, and people being slain in the Spirit. These diverse worship experiences gave me an appreciation for the various expressions of worship. My mother often said she was more interested in me loving Jesus than loving a particular denomination or church. My rich spiritual heritage, foundation of prayer, and exposure to diverse styles of worship gave me a respect for others' context, a love for the Body of Christ, and a comfort level with people of various stripes. These are commonalities that have run through every phase and stage of my life and ministry.

My personal, spiritual journey began at the age of sixteen when I attended a city-wide youth revival at Mount Olive Baptist Church in Clairton, Pennsylvania. The minister preached a message about the lost sheep in Luke chapter fifteen, and I knew that I was that lost sheep. I felt the love of God as I had never felt it before, and without any provocation or coercion, with tears streaming down my face, I went to the altar and gave my heart to the Lord. I was born again on June 11, 1971. I started my walk with the Lord as a teenager in the Pentecostal church. This is where I delivered my first message

entitled, “Blessed, Broken, and Given;” and it is the place where I first sensed the call of God to teach.

My transition from adolescence into adulthood was not without baggage. I suffered from low self-esteem and flawed self-perceptions. Before “Black was Beautiful,” and “Dark was Lovely,” society had conditioned me to believe that only fair-skinned girls with light eyes and long hair were pretty. As a dark-skinned girl, I had a distorted image of myself, and it took a long process for me to evolve. My God-given identity was revealed to me through prayer and the story in Luke 9:19-20, where everyone’s opinion of Jesus’s identity was wrong except Peter. My heavenly Father revealed my true identity to me, and I have never questioned it since that day. I discovered that I was made in the image of God. I was fearfully and wonderfully made. I was accepted into the Beloved. My true value, self-worth, and concept of myself became a settled matter. This was the first “Who Am I” revelation that God gave me as a young Christian woman.

My spiritual journey led me from the Pentecostal church to a Full Gospel Assembly of God church located in Greensburg, Pennsylvania. This was a Word-centered, multi-racial church. God used my time at Full Gospel to help me learn and unlearn aspects of my fundamentalist upbringing in preparation for my next step. At Full Gospel, I was exposed to a Charismatic worship experience different from my Methodist and Pentecostal experiences.

My post-secondary education began years after I was employed at the Community College of Allegheny County. I had barely begun my educational journey as an adult learner when my father had a massive heart attack and died at the age of fifty. The sudden

death of my father when I was twenty-three years old affected me deeply and altered the course of my educational endeavors and my life. My parents were married for over twenty-five years when my father died. I recall my mother being lost. My father oversaw all the household affairs; my mother was under enormous stress and in a constant state of panic. This was my first encounter with the effects of becoming a widow, and I was too young to grasp what she was experiencing as a young widow.

Educational pursuits as a working adult meant attending school in the evenings. Most of my adult life consisted of work, school, and church. While serving in ministry and working full-time, I earned an associate degree, a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Management from Point Park College in 1990, and a Master of Science degree in Professional Leadership, concentrating in Training and Development from Carlow College in 1996.

The greatest preparation I received for ministry took place during the fourteen years I was a member of The Lord's Church of Pittsburgh. On April 12, 1986, I joined the church's inaugural service and became one of the first charter members. I participated in aspects of ministry that I would not have otherwise been exposed to if I had not been part of the start-up. I discovered my administrative gifting and leadership skills. I worked on every major event the church hosted, and I was allowed to design and deliver several training classes. I designed a New Member orientation and co-facilitated strategic planning sessions. I served as the Administrative Ministry Director, led worship, led prayer, and conducted leadership training classes. I also served on the Pastor's Advisory Board, the Strategic Planning Committee, and the Board of Trustees. My ministry

preparation included conferences, John Maxwell Leadership classes, and Creation Therapy training through Sarasota Academy of Christian Counseling.

In 2000, my husband and I joined the New Spirit Revival Center (NSRC) in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. Based on my previous ministry experience, I was regularly given opportunities to teach, preach, and counsel. I was made department head and eventually appointed as overseer of the New Members ministry. I redesigned the entire program, rewrote the curriculum, trained instructors, and taught several modules. I joined the women's ministry and graduated from the NSRC's Women's Educational Mentoring Alliance (WEMA) in 2002. I became a WEMA instructor, designed and taught a nine-session class, several breakout sessions at the women's conferences, and became a Board member. I was ordained as an Elder in November of 2004, and in December, the same year, I received a certificate in Biblical Counseling from the American Association of Christian Counselors. In 2012, I completed several corporate-sponsored training classes at Case Western Reserve University. I also earned the Emotionally Intelligent Leader Certificate from the Weatherhead School of Management.

While at NSRC, I experienced the darkest days in my adulthood. I suffered losses in every area of my life. During this time, my husband was also having health challenges. He suffered multiple heart attacks and survived open-heart surgery, only to be diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma. The strain was overwhelming, and the pressure was so great I suffered physically, mentally, and emotionally. This was my Job-like experience, and everything I ever thought I knew about God was challenged. My faith in God was shaken to the core. My husband had been in the Intensive Care Unit for over a month when I was

told he had hours to live. On October 3, 2006, eleven days before our sixth wedding anniversary, my husband passed away.

My heart was broken when my husband died; and I became a widow. Nothing in my life had prepared me for what was ahead. The death of my husband triggered several unexpected losses that changed my life. I lost my husband, myself, and my sense of purpose. Blindsided, dumbfounded, and unprepared for the myriads of emotions that were unleashed, I experienced intense feelings of grief, despondency, abandonment, disorientation, and isolation. I was left alone in Ohio, away from family and friends to sort things out and complete a list of onerous tasks that only I could do. I felt like the world around me was moving fast forward while I was moving in slow motion. Simple tasks became complicated as I struggled to navigate the daunting realities of widowhood.

My grief was further exacerbated when seven months after my husband died in 2006, my father-in-law passed away in 2007, and eleven months following his death, my mother-in-law died in 2008. With each loss, a wound that had not healed was reopened, and I relived the last hours with my husband repeatedly. I felt such a deep sense of loss and pain that I wondered if I would ever get over the grief I felt.

For many years, I thought the deaths of my grandparents in 1989 and 1990, and my oldest brother in 1992, were the worst, but nothing compared to losing my husband. Losing my husband is when I learned the most about grief. Grief does not have a timeline, and over the next eight years, I lived through a period that I found challenging to understand and had no words to explain. I remained in a perpetual state of grief until October 2011, when I attended a women's conference in London, England. It was the

first death anniversary in five years that I did not spend reliving the pain of the last week of my husband's life.

In 2014, I wrote my first book *Tearful Surrender Joyful Release – Journey From Brokenness to Breakthrough*. Writing was extremely difficult, but the process was cathartic, and God mended my broken heart. From that time until now, my heart has been stirred with compassion for widows, compelling me to extend to them the same comfort and care that the Lord graciously extended to me. I became a certified grief recovery specialist to help others and to better understand my lengthy grieving process as well. That is when my ministry to widows was birthed.

Develop the Synergy

Widows share a common bond and are members of a unique, exclusive group that only another widow can fully comprehend. It was not until I became a widow that the phrase "the widows were neglected" found in Acts 6:1 resonated deep within me. The need to address the issues of the neglected widow, identified in my context, my spiritual journey, ministry training, and skills, forms a symbiotic relationship that shapes my research. The topic I will explore is the neglect of widows evident in our culture, community, and particularly our churches. "Widowhood and the Role of Pastoral Care in Establishing a Community of Support" is the focus of my project.

As I researched my context, I recognized the common denominators between my context, my personal experience, and my interests were loss, grief, and neglect. Loss is not limited to the loss of loved ones. Other types of losses include identity, safety, and even communities devastated by loss tied to the decline of steel mills. I have witnessed

my community grieved, broken, fragile, and neglected. My context and other ministries carry the weight of the city. Similarly, widows suffered the devastating loss of their husbands and are left grieving, broken, fragile, and neglected.

The loss of a spouse has long been regarded as the most stressful event of a lifetime.[14] A widow's loss is further compounded if she has concerns about money, worries about her personal welfare, or the welfare of her children. Decisions that were previously made jointly or by their spouse are now their sole responsibility to make alone. These added stresses distinguish the loss of a spouse from other losses, and it is the reason losing a spouse ranks first on the list of stressors.

According to the U. S. Census Bureau's March 2022 estimates, there are over eleven million widows in the United States, and there are 2800 married women who will become widowed every day.[15] The number of widows is staggering, considering the baby boomers' aging population and the many COVID-19-related deaths during the pandemic. Widows are just as likely to be women in their 20s or 30s as they are to be in their 60s, 70s, or 80s. As a grief recovery specialist, I have met widows in every age group. The pain and formidable challenges they face do not discriminate based on age or the length of their marriage.

Widows are emotionally, mentally, and physically imperiled because of the effects of losing their husbands. I understand firsthand the anguish a widow feels after the

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[14] Anoushka D. Shahane, Ryan L. Brown, Bryan T. Denny, and Christopher P. Fagundes, "Lexical Markers of Cognitive Reappraisal, Bereavement, and Proinflammatory Cytokine Production," *Health Psychology* 42, no. 1 (Jan 2023): 24-32, https://doi.org/10.1037/hea000120710.1037/hea0001207.

[15] Jean Miller, Kathleen Best, Jordan Harrold, Lisa Theoharides, Cyndi Williams, "2021-22 Community Report," Modern Widows Club, https://modernwidowsclub.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/mwc_impact_report_2011-2020_editjul21.pdf.

condolences stop, everyone goes their way, and you are left alone to navigate the feelings of loss and the maze of other unexpected losses. The world of grief was beyond my comprehension. I quickly found out that only another widow could fully relate to the immense sadness and feelings of abandonment that accompany the loss of a husband. Widowhood takes you to a place and a space that it is impossible to understand until you get there.

I turned to the scriptures for comfort, and I learned there are more widows and more about the care of widows than I had ever noticed before. Suddenly, I became keenly aware of the stories about Bathsheba, Abigail, Tamar, Ruth, Naomi, Anna, Orpah, Ruth, and every other widow in the Bible. Widows are one of the most fragile, vulnerable, and broken of God's children. Carl Dudley writes in *Studying Congregations*, "Students of the Bible have long recognized the special attention God devotes to "widows and orphans," the Biblical symbol of invisible people in every society."[16] Unfortunately, widows are just as invisible in the church as they are in society. Widows have shared with me that they are not even acknowledged; and people treat them like glass, like they are invisible. I have been asked, do I have a disease now that my husband died? Am I contagious? Why is it that we were great when he was alive, but now that he is dead, am I to disappear too?

Throughout the Bible, there are numerous scriptures regarding the care of widows and the deference they are to be shown yet, too often they are unseen and unheard. In the Old Testament, Isaiah 1:17 "Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend

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[16] Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, William McKinney, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 42.

the orphan, plead for the widow is one of many scriptures that admonish us to be an advocate for the widow. Luke, in the New Testament, shows a great affinity in his Gospel for women and a noticeable tendency to defend, reassure, and praise women.[17] He refers to widows nine times in his Gospel (2:37; 4:25-26; 7:12; 18:3, 5; 20:47; 21:2-3) and three times in the book of Acts (6:1, 9:39, 9:1). It is Luke who calls attention to the widows being overlooked, disregarded, and neglected in Act 6:1, "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration." We have deacons today because the early church responded to the mistreatment of widows.

All in all, the biblical materials portray widows as a social phenomenon that is part of every society, but the treatment of widows in the biblical materials is not fully appreciated until it is understood as an expression of religious obligation.[18] Caring for widows as prescribed in scripture is as important to God as prayer, fasting, studying the Bible, and other spiritual practices. Despite the directives found in the scripture, the widow is left to suffer alone because most churches do not have a ministry for widows and do not offer any type of grief support.

Dr. Thom Rainer affirms in "Outreach Magazine" that ministry to widows is one of the clearest mandates in scripture and it is also one of the most neglected mandates in scripture. He lists seven facts that highlight widows' struggles and the need for a ministry to widows in the church.

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[17] Carol E. Newsom, *The Woman's Bible Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 278.

[18] Steven J. Kraftchick, "Widows," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Law* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), https://www-oxfordreference-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/acref:obso/9780199843305.001.0001/acref-9780199843305-e-145.

1. The death of a spouse is the number one stressor in a person's life. Too many survivors are not ready to deal with the issues of widowhood (Holmes and Rohe stress scale).

2. Over 800,000 persons are widowed each year. Of that number, 700,000 are women (U. S. Bureau of the Census).

3. Widowhood lasts on the average fourteen years. That is a significant portion of any person's life (U. S. Bureau of the Census).

4. There are over fourteen million widows in the United States today. That is an average of 40 widows for every church in the United States (AARP).

5. Upon the death of a spouse, a widow loses 75% of her support base. Churches must stand in the gap (Widow's Hope).

6. Widows have a 30% higher risk of death in the first six months after the death of their husbands. They truly die of a broken heart (University of Glasgow)

7. The poverty rate among widows is three to four times higher than among elderly married women. Financial needs among widows are often great (Social Security Administration).[19]

Within my context, the widow's needs are unknown, and grief support does not exist. The lack of awareness and support are issues I seek to change with the implementation of my project. Having personally lived through the experience of not having a safe place to express my feelings, I know the challenges of navigating the grief and bereavement process without the benefit of a community of support. There was no one to help shed light on what I was going through or for me to give voice to my pain. There was no support group or grief ministry. There were no seminars, breakout sessions, or workshops to attend. I searched for information and found very little that spoke to my situation.

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[19] Thom Rainer, "Seven Reasons Your Church Should Have a Ministry for Widows," *Outreach Magazine* (2016), https://outreachmagazine.com/features/16645-7-reasons-your-church-should-have-a-ministry-to-widows.html.

Reflecting on the vocational, spiritual, life experiences, ministerial, and educational path the Lord has taken me on, I have been equipped with the skills, knowledge, and tools needed to serve my context through my Doctor of Ministry project. My list begins with my interest and desire to see widows strengthened and succored. When the phrase, "the widows were neglected" was illuminated to me, it became a clarion call to me. I have been moved with a compassion that compels me to do everything within my capacity to spare any widow from experiencing what I went through alone. My ministry to widows was birthed out of my pain and my desire to help widows find the strength to live again. I have lived through the bereavement process and emerged on the other side. I have been uniquely equipped to minister to grieving widows who are struggling to find their way. With that, I bring to my context the resilience I gained through my lived experiences as a widow.

From my time working in corporate America, I bring transferable skills that have served me in the marketplace and the house of God. I have held several management positions overseeing quality improvement, training, and employee satisfaction efforts. The skills I have acquired in planning—organizing, decision-making, establishing timelines, and goal-setting—will be useful in working on my project. Certifications as a local Malcolm Baldrige Quality Award examiner and an ISO 9000 examiner equipped me with the tools to measure and analyze the results. Years in the training and development profession will allow me to design, develop, facilitate, gather data, and identify trends.

I have worked with women's ministry for over twenty years and with widows for the last ten years. Specific to widows, I have facilitated workshops and represented

widow's interests in panel discussions. My ministry training includes biblical counseling, grief recovery, disaster recovery coaching, and leadership training. Lastly, in preparation to meet the needs of my context, I earned a Master of Ministry degree from United Theological Seminary in May of 2023; and in August, I began the Doctor of Ministry program. In addition to the vocational and educational skills and interests I bring to the context, my personal experiences as a widow and firsthand knowledge of the angst of navigating the grief and bereavement process without the benefit of a community of support have provided me with valuable insights into the gap identified in my context.

The general nature of the proposed project is to raise awareness of the existence of widows and their unique challenges within the context. The desired outcome is that the context moves forward with developing a formal support program for widows. The hypothesis for this project is that if ministry leadership participates in workshops about what it means to be a widow, then they will become more sensitive (aware) of the needs of those members who are widows. The secondary desired outcome of the project is to give voice to widows who feel their voices were silenced alongside their husbands, and to create a framework for a community of support for those who feel lost, alone, and misunderstood.

The proposed project plan consists of moderator-led sessions that I will facilitate. Data will be collected from approximately ten to fifteen church leaders through semi-structured, face-to-face sessions, pre- and post-questionnaires surveys, observations, group discussions, and reflective journaling. Sessions will not exceed two hours, and the project will be six weeks in duration. The proposed content will include prayer, rapport building, and safety in the context, content, and process. The theme, "the widows are

neglected" will be incorporated throughout each session. All sessions will take place at KCM, the context location. The findings will inform recommendations for leadership training and the development of effective widow-support initiatives.

First, I seek to learn from the project if my hypothesis is supported. If ministry leadership participates in a workshop about what it means to be a widow, then they will become more sensitive to the needs of those members who are widows. Just as Luke records in Acts 6:1-3, when there was knowledge of a complaint, an awareness of the neglected widows, there was action taken by the leaders.

My interest in women's ministry was motivated by my desire for women to reach their full potential. Implementing the project, I desire to learn more about the needs of widows. God heals the broken-hearted, and widows gain inner strength and become resilient as they press through grief. I seek to learn more about George Bonanno's work on resilience and prolonged grief disorder.[20]

As I gain more knowledge, I anticipate acquiring tools that will help me effectively evaluate new trends and implement innovative solutions targeted at meeting the needs of my ministry to widows, my church, and my community. I also anticipate becoming more intentional about seeking opportunities to establish partnerships and collaborating with foundations and other organizations as a means of providing needed resources or services in my urban context. I also seek to learn if the outcome is indeed supported, can the project be replicated, and serve as a blueprint for other contexts and

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[20] George A. Bonanno, *The Other Side of Sadness: What the New Science of Bereavement Tells Us About Life After Loss* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2010), 96.

ministries for subsequent generations. My desire significantly impacts the lives of widows and revolutionizes the thinking of leaders concerning widows.

Chapter One presented my personal and professional background, ministry experiences, and my phenomenological perspective as a widow. Chapter Two, Biblical Foundation, transitions from personal and ministry context to the scriptural foundation that informs this project. This chapter draws on the Prophet Isaiah's opening words to explore God's clear directives for justice, advocacy, and care for the disadvantaged, particularly widows.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The scripture selected for this biblical foundation chapter is Isaiah 1:17, which in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) reads "Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow." This text supports this doctoral project and affirms the divine mandate to care for the marginalized in society. God's concern for orphans, the fatherless, and widows is undeniable and expressed throughout the Bible. They are identified as the most vulnerable and garner special care. Leaders were responsible for protecting these classes of people and ensuring that justice was done on their behalf.[1] It is the widow, however, who is in every society the biblical symbol of invisible people.[2] Society today is no exception; widows remain invisible and are the central focus of this project.

The challenge identified in the context of this project was that it is not equipped and properly trained to address the unique needs of persons experiencing the loss of their spouse, which causes the needs of the surviving spouse to be neglected. The chosen

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[1] Laird R. Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament,* vol. 1 (Chicago, IL: The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1980), 47.

[2] Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 42.

scripture in Isaiah records imperatives applicable to leadership and aspects related to meeting the needs of the widow. Isaiah's admonition to leaders and laity to learn, pursue, defend, take up the cause, and plead the case of the disenfranchised harmonizes with the hypothesis that if ministry leadership participates in workshops about what it means to be a widow, then they would become more sensitive (aware) to the needs of those members who are widows. Isaiah 1:17 aligns with the goal of this project, which is to educate and engage leaders who will facilitate meeting the unique needs of the widows in the church and the community.

This doctoral project examined "Widowhood and the Role of Pastoral Care in Establishing A Community of Support." Widowhood refers to the state of being unmarried due to the loss of a spouse through death.[3] Pain and grief are common denominators among widows and widowers, and both suffer emotionally, psychologically, and often physically. The divergence of the lived experiences of the two, as well as personal experiences as a widow, led to the focus towards addressing the needs of the widows rather than widowers.

The Encyclopedia of Death and the Human Experience asserts the bereavement experiences of widows and widowers are different, and it states, "Gender is one of the most powerful influences on the experience of widowhood."[4] It continues, "One of the most widely documented sources of distress among widows is economic strain."[5] Men

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[3] Encyclopedia of European Social History, "Almanacs, Transcripts, and Maps," Encyclopedia, http://www.encyclopedia.com/international/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/widows-and-widowers.

[4] Clifton Bryant and Dennis Peck, *Encyclopedia of Death and the Human Experience* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2024), 990, https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412972031.

[5] Bryant and Peck, *Encyclopedia of Death,* 990.

have historically earned more than women, and the gender pay gap continues to exist. According to the 2024 Gender Pay Gap report, the disparity between women's and men's earnings is 17%.[6] Income inequality between men and women is just one factor that contributes to the economic distress widows are more prone to face than widowers.

In addition to the gender pay gap, equally important is the adverse role societal expectations, religious beliefs, culture, and gender socialization have on grieving widows versus widowers. The authors of *Grieving Beyond Gender* argue and caution, "gender influences patterns of grief, but gender does not determine patterns of grief."[7] Lastly, women are more likely to be beneficiaries of pastoral care and a community of support, according to research indicating that men are more reluctant to participate in support groups. Neither group is monolithic, and stereotypes and generalizations oversimplify their individual bereavement experiences of widowhood.

The death of a spouse (male or female) is widely accepted as a stressful life event that marks a turning point and major milestone in the life of the surviving partner.[8] From a biblical perspective, the widow's welfare significantly dominates the scripture compared to that of the widower. The *Torah Women's Commentary* informs us that the word for widow (almanah) appears fifty-five times with eleven of those occurrences appearing in Deuteronomy (10:18; 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:17, 19, 20, 21; 26:12, 13; 27:19).

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[6] Payscale, "2024 Gender Pay Gap Report," Payscale, https://www.payscale.com/content/report/2024-gender-pay-gap-report.pdf.

[7] Kenneth J. Doka and Terry L. Martin, *Grieving Beyond Gender: Understanding Diverse Grieving Styles*, Third ed. (New York, NY: Routedge, 2025), 144.

[8] Deborah Carr and Rebecca Utz, "Late-Life Widowhood in the United States: New Directions in Research and Theory," *Ageing International* 27, no. 1 (December 1, 2001): 65–88, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12126-001-1016-3.

Conversely, the same commentary asserts the occurrence of the masculine form of the word (alman) appears only once in the entire Bible (Jer. 51:5).[9]

Several Old and New Testament stories chronicle the challenges, needs, and special care God directs toward the widow, which is not true of the widower. Detailed narratives are not found and there is no reference regarding their care. Accounts of men grieving their wives' deaths are not completely absent from scripture, but they are sparsely mentioned, as in the case of Abraham mourning the death of Sarah (Gen. 23:2) and Jacob mourning the death of Rachel (Gen. 35:19-20).

Historical Context

The Book of Isaiah is the first of the Hebrew major prophets in the Old Testament, and it is the first of the latter prophets. Isaiah is also the first of the prophetic books in the Christian canon, followed by Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, the three longest books of prophecy.[10] Isaiah is a contemporary of several other prophets, including Hosea, Micah, and Zephaniah, and unlike them, Isaiah has a high social status that allows him easy access to kings (Isa. 7:3-9; 38:1-8).[11] The Book of Isaiah is the most frequently quoted book in the New Testament, and it is the most copied prophetic book from the Dead Sea Scrolls.[12]

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[9] Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, Andrea L. Weiss, and Women of Reform Judaism (U.S.), *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* (New York, NY: Women of Reform Judaism, 2018), 1108.

[10] Victor H. Matthews, *101 Questions and Answers on The Prophets of Israel* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2007), 3.

[11] Matthews, *101 Questions and Answers on The Prophets of Israel*, 62.

[12] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig Bartholomew, and Daniel Treier, *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament: A Book-By-Book Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 157, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=570319.

Isaiah is introduced as the son of Amoz without any additional information on his background. Isaiah's name means yesha (salvation, help, deliverance). The book is identified as "the vision of Isaiah" (Isa. 6:1).[13] His ministry began during the reign of Uzziah (c. 790-738 BCE), probably the year of his death (Isa. 6:1). His message was directed to Judah and Jerusalem during the reign of four kings: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and his ministry extended into the reign of Hezekiah (c.715-687/686 BCE).[14] Spanning a period of forty years through 701 BCE (Isa. 36-39), the last recorded episode in his career was at the time of the invasion of Judah by the Assyrian king Sennacherib.[15] Four pivotal moments provide the historical background for the Book of Isaiah: the Syro-Ephaimite War and its aftermath (2 Kings 16). The Assyrian invasion, the conquest of Jerusalem, and the return of the exiled in Babylon.[16]

Various schools of thought exist among scholars as to whether Isaiah is the actual author of the entire book that bears his name, and it is widely accepted that he is not.[17] Scholars also debate the structure of Isaiah based on its historical reference points and the seminal work of Bernhard Duhm in 1892.[18] Modern scholars generally embrace three major divisions and authorships to the book. Isaiah is credited for penning chapters one to

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[13] Leander E. Keck, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 6 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 45.

[14] J. J. M. Roberts, *Hermeneia, A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible: First Isaiah* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 11.

[15] Roberts, *Hermeneia, A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*, 12.

[16] Michael D. Coogan et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version*, 5th ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 977–978.

[17] Jacob Stromberg, *An Introduction to the Study of Isaiah* (New York, NY: T and T Clark International, 2011), 2.

[18] Roberts, *Hermeneia, A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*, 11.

thirty-nine, which are referred to as First Isaiah or Proto Isaiah.[19] These chapters contain the original words of Isaiah who witnessed the Assyrian invasion of Israel and Judah in 742-701 BCE.[20] Chapters forty to fifty-five are identified as Second Isaiah or Deutero-Isaiah and penned by an anonymous author exiled in Babylon, and Third Isaiah or Trito-Isaiah chapters fifty-six to sixty-six written (late sixth through fifth or fourth BCE) during the early Persian-period restoration of Jerusalem.[21] Chapters fifty-five through sixty-six are thought to be the anthology of those passages, and others believe they are a collection of materials from several post-exiled anonymous prophets.[22] Despite the debate surrounding the composition of Isaiah, there is agreement among most scholars that Isaiah one and Isaiah sixty-six serve as bookends that frame the structure of the entire book.[23]

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[19] Coogan et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, 977.

[20] Coogan et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, 977.

[21] Coogan et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, 977.

[22] Coogan et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, 977.

[23] Carolyn J. Sharp, *The Prophetic Literature* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2019), 42.

Literary Context

The Book of Isaiah is prophetic literature,[24] and the majority of the book is poetry except for the narratives in Isaiah chapters six through eight and thirty-six to thirty-nine.[25] Carolyn Sharp cites Ulrich Berge's assertion that verses thirty-six to thirty-nine constitute the theological center of the book, which should be envisioned as a "literary cathedral" that looks at Zion's past history and future destiny. Berges identifies the overall structure of Isaiah as: (1) Zion and Jerusalem between judgment and salvation (1-12); (2) Zion's enemies and friends – YHWH's kingship (13-17); (3) The divine king and the congregation of Zion (25-35); (4) The threat to and deliverance of Zion and Jerusalem (36-39); (5) The [servant] Jacob/Israel in Babylon and his liberation by Cyrus (40-48); (6) The restoration of Zion and work of the [servant] (49-54); (7) The division in Israel and the fate of the [servants] (55-66).[26]

The literary structure of Isaiah's oracles has been distinguished between five major types of speeches: autobiographical narratives, private oracles, public oracles, primary biographical narratives, and secondary narratives.[27] Scholars have observed that chapter one, verses one through thirty-one rehearses the major themes of Isaiah and serves as a "prologue" for the book. Following the superscription, chapter one as a whole

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[24] Coogan et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, 973.

[25] Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, *The Oxford Handbook of Isaiah*, Oxford Handbooks (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 20.1, http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190669249.001.0001.

[26] Sharp, *The Prophetic Literature*, 43.

[27] Claus Westermann and Hugh Clayton White, *Basics Forms of Prophetic Speech* (London, UK: Lutterworth Press, 1967), 44.

is preparation for the entire Book of Isaiah.[28] It is a public oracle and the prophetic genre is a trial speech/covenant lawsuit form that uses legal language to depict a courtroom setting and to bring an accusation against the people of Judah and Jerusalem for their crimes.[29] Marvin Swinney identified seven units in chapter one:

I.	Superscription	1
I.	Prophetic Announcement of God's Accusation against Israel	2 - 3
II.	Prophetic Admonition Speech to the People concerning Continued Apostasy	4 - 9
III.	Prophetic Torah Speech Concerning Proper Service to God	10 - 17
IV.	Prophetic Announcement of God's Appeal to Begin a Legal Proceedings	18 - 20
V.	Prophetic Rehabilitation Speech	21 - 26
VI.	Announcement of the Redemption of Zion	27 - 31[30]

While some scholars view this chapter as a collection of independent units, there is evidence that the units contained in this chapter have some relation among themselves.[31]

Exegetical Analysis

The verses preceding Isaiah 1:17 provide the contextual setting for the detailed exegetical analysis and warrant a high-level examination. The opening prophetic words of Isaiah chapter one are a call to witness Yahweh's public accusation against his people.[32] Marvin Sweeney refers to the message as accusation speech or a prophetic announcement in which Isaiah likens God's speech to that of a prosecuting attorney in a

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[28] J. Gordon McConville and Mark Boda, "Isaiah," *Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Prophetic Books* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023), 45.

[29] Coogan et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, 973.

[30] Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition*, Reprint 2018 (Berlin, UK: De Gruyter, 2018), 100, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110854565.

[31] Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition*, 120.

[32] McConville and Boda, "Isaiah," 45.

courtroom, bringing a charge against Israel in a legal case.[33] Verse one functions as an introduction to the book as a whole, even though it includes material of different dates. An invitation to hear the case is first extended to a hypothetical jury or audience, the heavens and earth, and the indictments are introduced in the form of a parable (Isa. 1:2-3).[34] Accusation speech is introduced by the prophet and quoted by him, according to Sweeney, who referred to this accusation speech as a "Prophetic announcement of YHWH's accusation against Israel and plaintiff bringing a charge against a defendant in a legal case."[35]

The prophet continues with accusatory language in verse four, leading a compelling argument as to why the people should change their rebellious ways.[36] The introductory particle (הוֹי (hôy), "Hey!" is typically used to signify a new unit,[37] and Isaiah proceeds with a reminder of the suffering that has already been exacted upon Israel brought about by their faithlessness (Isa. 1:5-9).[38] This unit ends with Isaiah speaking in the first person becomes the speaker and the audience, including himself, as a survivor left in Jerusalem after it was besieged.[39]

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[33] Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition*, 103.

[34] McConville and Boda, "Isaiah," 49.

[35] Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition*, 103.

[36] Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition*, 104.

[37] Roberts, *Hermeneia, A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*, 17.

[38] Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition*, 104.

[39] Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition*, 106.

The failure of worship without justice is the concern of the prophet in verses ten through seventeen, and it is a concern addressed in this project.[40] Sweeney writes, "The unit begins with a specialized form of the call to attention known as the call to instruction. Such a call generally includes two commands to hear…"[41] Isaiah's tone and his message shift directly to the leaders and the people, contemptuously identifying them as "rulers of Sodom … people of Gomorrah" using the comparison to those wicked cities to amplify their sinfulness and to emphasize the severity of God's contempt.[42] In verses eleven through fifteen, the YHWH speech formula is used to interrogate and enumerate several indictments, including the demand to stop trampling God's courts and attempting to placate his displeasure through futile religious acts.[43]

Scholars agree their worship is abominable to God and is, in part, the source of their problems. McConville states, "The conjunction of wicked behavior with the motions of worship is abhorrent to Yahweh. His rejection is couched in the anthropomorphism of hatred, disgust, and weariness."[44] Roberts states, "In God's lawsuit against Israel, he not only points out Israel's rebellion as the cause of its troubles; he also rejects the sacrificial ritual as an adequate remedy for the situation."[45] He maintains that the blood on their hands (Isa. 1:15) is not the blood of sacrificial animals but of the acts of violence perpetrated against the weakest members of Israelite society, and the relationship with

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[40] Keck, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, 6:58.

[41] Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition*, 108.

[42] Keck, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, 6:69.

[43] Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition*, 109.

[44] McConville and Boda, "Isaiah," 57.

[45] Roberts, *Hermeneia, A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*, 23.

God had been shattered by the people's mistreatment of the powerless.[46] The people are accused of trusting in the trappings of worship when they should be seeking justice and caring for the oppressed.[47]

Brevard Childs writes, "that the remedy to this intolerable situation is offered in highly concrete imperatives."[48] Nine imperatives for proper service to God and for a teetering society to reverse its course are contained in verses sixteen and seventeen: (1) wash yourselves, (2) make yourself clean, (3) remove the evil doings, (4) cease to do evil, (5) learn to do right, (6) seek justice, (7) defend the oppressed, (8) take up the cause of the fatherless, (9) plead the case of the widow. The imperatives are prescriptive and intended to evoke change.[49] Sweeney writes, "There is a progression of concepts in these instructions."[50] He believes that washing leads to purification, which allows one to stop doing evil. Once one ceases doing evil, he may begin to learn good. This leads to general goals of seeking justice, correcting oppression, judging the orphans, and pleading for the widow.

The remedy to Jerusalem's miserable conditions and suffering addressed by Isaiah relied upon them turning from ritualistic, meaningless worship, repenting, and changing their behaviors towards the oppressed, fatherless, and widows. The purpose of the prophetic Torah in verses ten to seventeen is to point out to the people the correct way to

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[46] Roberts, *Hermeneia, A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*, 23.

[47] Keck, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, 6:39.

[48] Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2000), 20, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=3416778.

[49] Thomas Nolden, *In the Face of Adversity, Translating Difference and Dissent* (London, UK: UCL Press, 2023), 38, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2tsxmpp.9.

[50] Sweeney*, Isaiah 1-4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition*, 110.

serve God, who requires righteousness and justice in people, not false acts of religious activities.[51] God rejects their religion because of how they treat the weak among them. Isaiah and James (James 1:27) provide the same solution to the faithless observation of outward forms of worship.[52] James 1:27 reads, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world." The people were blessed when they had regard for widows[53] (Deut. 14:29), and justice was done (Isa. 1:17, 23).

Deuteronomy 14:29 states, "The Levite, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you, as well as the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, may come and eat their fill so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work you undertake." Exodus 22:21-24 reads:

> You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry; my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children orphans.

The reproof/instruction in one sentence speech is Prophetic Torah, and it presupposes a Priestly Torah that contains reproof (Isa. 1:11-15) and instruction (Isa.1:16-17) in one speech.[54] The legal background of much of the material in this chapter and the accusation character suggest that the verses are the speech of an accuser or prosecutor in court; however, the scripture goes beyond the purpose of accusation and attempts to motivate

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[51] Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition*, 128.

[52] Walter A. Elwell, *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 585.

[53] Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament Vol. 1*, 1:47.

[54] Westermann and White, *Basics Forms of Prophetic Speech*, 203.

the people to repent and live as God requires, making the speech of the accuser also function as an exhortation.[55] These imperatives reveal God's will and his understanding of what it means to do good, seek justice, and correct oppression.[56]

Word Study

Some scholars view this chapter as a collection of separate, independent units, while others examine catchword connections to argue that it is one cohesive composition. Repeated words, phrases, and patterns related to the text are in this section. The word justice is one of the catchwords in verse seventeen, connecting it to multiple units. The word justice occurs three times in this chapter; the first occurrence is in verse seventeen (seek justice), the second time in verse twenty-one (She that was full of justice), and the third occurrence is in verse twenty-seven (Zion shall be redeemed by justice). God is a God of justice, and word is used to describe their past, present, and future.

The word widow occurs in verse seventeen as an imperative (plead the case of the widow) and in verse twenty-three (widow's cause does not come before them) as an indictment. Verse seventeen is also connected to verses eighteen through twenty not by catchwords but by the lawsuit imagery and the specific legal terminology (justice, defend, plead) Isaiah uses.[57] An examination of the Hebrew meaning of keywords in the phrases in verse seventeen further accentuates the divine mandate to care for those marginalized members of society.

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[55] Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition*, 142.

[56] Elwell, *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, 585.

[57] Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition*, 120.

The first imperative, "Learn to do right," is the first phrase, and the Hebrew verb used for "learn" is (לָמַד (lāmad)" and it means to teach or instruct.[58] It is one of twelve words used in the Old Testament that carry the idea of training and educating.[59] Unlike the Greek language, which has two different words that distinguish between to learn and to teach, the Hebrew word uses the same root for both words because all learning and teaching is ultimately to be found in the fear of the Lord (Deut. 4:10; 14:23;17:19; 31:12-13).[60] The *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* adds that in the ancient Near East, the verb (lmd*)* was used to also mean "practice,"[61] and this underlying meaning adds the dimension of "having an experience," "being accustomed to," or "familiar with."[62] To do right is the verb (yatab) interpreted, which is "be (make) good, be well, be glad, be pleasing, earnestly, and it is a call for a radical decision to change, to amend your ways and your actions."[63] The admonition is to become accustomed to practicing what pleases God.

"Seek justice" is the second imperative in verse seventeen, suggesting it is one of the ways to practice doing good. The Hebrew word for seek is (darash) and is defined as to pursue, search, ask, diligently inquire, make inquisition require, and seek with care.[64]

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[58] James Strong, *Strong's Greek and Hebrew Dictionary of the Bible* (Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Publishing Toronto, 2016), 2792.

[59] Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament Vol. 1*, 1:480.

[60] Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament Vol. 1*, 1:480.

[61] Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament Vol. 1*, 1:480.

[62] Johannes G. Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 5.

[63] Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament Vol. 1*, 1:375.

[64] Strong*, Strong's Greek and Hebrew Dictionary of the Bible*, 2183.

A theological theme is to seek with care (cognitive), seek the place God would choose, and seek justice.[65] The word justice appears three times in the opening chapter of Isaiah (v. 17, 21, and 27). The Hebrew word for justice is (mishpat), and it is interpreted as a verdict (favorable or unfavorable), pronounced judicially, (human or participant) divine law, judgment, a participant's right or privilege.[66]

The biblical concept of justice involves much more than fairness, and it includes compassion for those marginalized and powerless, such as victims of oppression, aliens, and widows.[67] The article entitled "Justice" in The Oxford Encyclopedia of Bible and Law provides the social and historical background related to social and distributive justice. It states that justice is one of the most prominent topics in the laws of the Torah. The social history of ancient Israel was based on a kinship society of strong extended families grouped in patrilineal clans. The head of the clan had equality of respect, and there was rough equality of wealth. As the ruling class developed, wealthier and poorer classes developed, leaving the poor and marginalized exposed to exploitation. The article asserts Israel's leaders were to be protectors of the poor and marginalized from oppressors; its wisdom warns, its prophecy condemns, and its kings are urged to judge in favor of the poor. There are two main principles in the section on justice in the laws of the Hebrew Bible: (1) the obligation of the privileged to behave with generosity to poor people and (2) not to take advantage of those in their power.[68]

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[65] Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament Vol. 1*, 1:198–99.

[66] Strong, *Strong's Greek and Hebrew Dictionary of the Bible*, 3089.

[67] Elwell, *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, 585.

[68] Brian A. Strawn, "Justice," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Law* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 69; Walter J. Houston, "Justice," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible*

The phrase 'Plead the case of the widow' is the next phrase that warrants examination. The Hebrew word for plead is *Rib* and it is interpreted as strive, contend, chide, complain, and rebuke for or debate in Strong's commentary.[69] It is also to conduct a case or suit, to make a complaint or quarrel. The widow and the fatherless are specifically mentioned in (Isa. 1:17) and preceded by words that suggest the need for advocacy. A widow in the context of Israel is abandoned by God.

The Oxford Encyclopedia of Bible and Law indicate there are approximately seventy-five references to widow (Heb. almana; GK chera) in biblical literature, with the majority (sixty) occurring in the Hebrew Bible. The article further states that the word widow is found in the law materials, prophetic writings, and wisdom literature, demonstrating the care for the widows socially and legally.[70] The distribution of the term "widow" is found approximately one-third of the time in legal texts, one-third in prophetic texts, and one-third in wisdom and historical literature, but the vast majority of the contexts are legal, either dealing with justice (the legal protection of the widow) or injustice (the exploitation of her status).[71]

To fully understand the vehement anger and the railing accusations made in (Isa. 1:10-15) for neglecting the widow, the Jewish social context must be understood. The patrilineal, endogamous marriage structure, women were objects of arranged marriages, often married at age twelve or thirteen, and they went from the protection of their father's

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and Law (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), https://www-oxfordreference-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/acref:obso/9780199843305.001.0001/acref-9780199843305-e-69.

[69] Strong, *Strong's Greek and Hebrew Dictionary of the Bible*, 3811.

[70] Strawn, "Widow," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Law* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1164.

[71] Elwell, Baker *Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, 817.

household to the protection of their husbands. The status of the woman depended on her husband's status, and his death typically forced her to exist in the margins of society, dependent on others.[72]

Isaiah speaks to the deference, compassion, and special care for the widow God required (1:17) as well as God's fierce displeasure for not taking up the cause of the widow (1:23). Isaiah references widows multiple times in his book (1:17, 1:23, 9:17; 10:2, 47:8-9; 54:4); and he is joined by other major and minor prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Malachi who pleaded the cause of widows.

Translation Comparison of Isaiah 1:17

Table 1. Comparison of Isaiah 1:17 Translations

Isaiah 1:17 NRSV	Isaiah 1:17 NET	Isaiah 1:17 NIV
Learn to do good; Seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.	Learn to do what is right. Promote justice. Give the oppressed reason to celebrate. Take up the cause of the orphan. Defend the rights of the widow.	Learn to do right; Seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; Plead the case of the widow.

The translation comparison table compares Isaiah 1:17 in three different translations: the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), the New English Translation (NET), and the New International Version (NIV). Verse seventeen is the last in the portion of scripture (Isa. 1:10-17); the King James Bible and other translations refer to it as "Meaningless Offerings." These meaningless offerings (burnt offerings, blood of bulls, lambs, goats, appointed festivals) are listed in verses (Isa. 1:11-15). No meaningless

[72] Strawn, "Widow," 1164.

offerings appear in verses sixteen or seventeen, but there are nine instructions. Five imperatives are contained in the verse, and five commonalities exist between the New Revised Standard Version, the New English Version, and the New International Version. Found in each version are the words “learn, defend, justice oppressed, and widow.”

Conclusion

Researching Isaiah 1:17 and the preceding scriptures confirmed that it is the text most appropriate for this project. The contemporary church, every week, engages in various types of religious activities, worship services, conferences, giving offerings, and prayer meetings. All done under the umbrella of serving God and serving people, while overlooking those the Bible clearly states need the most. Religious activities without righteous justice for the marginalized present a perspective that widows understand, and others who have no familiarity with widowhood cannot see.

The scripture illuminated key components of the project: awareness, education, social justice, and the role of advocacy. A correlation was drawn between the call to hear and listen in verse ten and the need to raise awareness among leaders and laity. Each of the five imperatives in verse seventeen connects to a key component of this research project. The “learn to do good” imperative connects to the educational aspects of the project, and the “seek justice” imperative aligns with the pursuit of change. The imperatives to defend and plead the widow’s case directly correlate to the advocacy component of the project.

The widows were neglected (Acts 6:1) is a metaphor adopted as the impetus for this project. Widows today, like the widows in the days of Isaiah, Moses, Zechariah,

Jeremiah, Luke, James, and Timothy, are a unique group of women with unique needs. Times have changed, and the needs of widows have evolved, but they still exist. Isaiah raised awareness of the problem, made his argument, appealed to the leaders and the people to change their behavior toward the most vulnerable, and presented them with the solution. The five instructions in Isaiah 1:17 provide the blueprint for this project. The text makes it clear how God views the care for widows and how leaders and society should as well. Today's pastors, leaders, and laity must be properly trained to provide pastoral care to those experiencing the loss of their spouse, particularly the widows.

While the Old and New Testaments are replete with scriptures that reveal God's compassion and concern for widows, evidence of that care is scarce in our religious institutions and communities. Isaiah 1:17 includes the care of widows (orphans) as a critical facet of worship. James echoed the same sentiments when he wrote, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after (visit) orphans and widows in their distress (affliction) and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27).

As Everett Fox observes, and I wholeheartedly agree, "It feels eerily familiar. It does not take much to find in the words of Isaiah's strong connections to our present predicaments with the text's emphasis on the sickness of the body politic, the oppression of the powerless, the transgressions of religious leaders amid professions of piety and correction of public institutions."[73] Fox affirms that Isaiah's prosecutorial-like approach exposes injustice, the failure of religious leaders, and the neglect of the vulnerable,

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[73] Everett Fox, "Isaiah 1 in Translation and Contexts," in *In the Face of Adversity,* Thomas Nolden, ed. (Cambridge, UK: UCL Press, 2023), 39, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2tsxmpp.9.

particularly widows still exist. The imperatives in Isaiah 1:17 echo through the corridors of time and continue to call contemporary faith leaders to act.

This Biblical Foundation Chapter used scholarly research to provide a detailed exegetical analysis of Isaiah 1:17—historical, literary, and social contexts. It also showed how Isaiah's advocacy for the marginalized aligned with widows' pastoral care needs.

The next chapter, Historical Foundation, explores the life of a sixteenth century widow whose experiences reflect the multifaceted realities of widowhood. Her bereavement process reflects the life experiences of widows in the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter delves into the intriguing life of Princess Joanna of Austria, a historical figure in the sixteenth century who stands out as the only female to live and die as a member of the Society of Jesus (S.J.), better known as the Jesuits. Joanna is the only female in history to become a member of the Society of Jesus under permanent vows.[1] Her attraction to this Roman Catholic, male-only religious order was its emphasis on educational, missionary, and charitable works with the marginalized.[2] Joanna's unique journey as a widow, her dedication to teaching, and the establishment of a community of support for women complement the biblical foundational scripture (Isa. 1:17) and the hypothesis for this project. Joanna's experience with widowhood and the convergence of her relationship with the Jesuits affirm the importance of establishing and belonging to a community of support.

Joanna of Austria, the Spanish princess of Hapsburg's house, was born in Madrid on June 24, 1535. Named after her paternal grandmother, Queen Joanna I of Castile, she

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[1] Thomas Worcester, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 430–431, https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=5046548.

[2] The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Jesuit: Definition, History, and Facts," Encyclopedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Jesuits.

was the youngest daughter of Emperor Charles V and Empress Isabel of Portugal. Joanna was one of three siblings: Phillip II (1527-1598), her oldest brother, and Maria (1528-1603), her older sister. Joanna's childhood was disrupted at the age of four by the death of her mother, who died from complications of childbirth.[3] Left in the care of her mother's officials, Joanna received an excellent education. She was skilled in music, and in addition to her native language, Spanish, she learned Portuguese and Latin. One of the devotional readings during her childhood and adolescence included "The Life of Christ" by one of the widely read authors of her time.[4]

Years later, during Joanna's travels to the Castilian countryside, she met Dona Leonor de Mascarenhas, a Portuguese governess believed to have been the first to pique Joanna's interest in the Jesuits. Leonor is credited with introducing Joanna to the Order of Poor Clares, a female branch of the Franciscans who chose poverty, fasting, and an observant lifestyle. This order carried out its own internal reforms, impressed Joanna, and influenced her piety. At seventeen, a marriage was arranged between Joanna and her cousin, Prince John (Joao Manuel) of Portugal, in a politically motivated move. The prince was two years younger than Joanna, but he was sickly. His health condition, concerns regarding his early demise, and the fact that there was no heir to the throne were the driving forces behind their union.

The fears of the Portuguese came to fruition with the sudden death of Prince Joao on January 2, 1554, two years after the couple married. To avoid complications with

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[3] Encyclopedia.com, "Joanna of Austria (1535-1573)," Encyclopedia.com, https://www.encyclopedia.com/women/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/joanna-austria-1535-1573.

[4] Noelia Garcia Perez, *The Making of Juana of Austria: Gender, Art, and Patronage in Early Modern Iberia* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2021), 152.

Joanna's delivery, the court hid the death of her husband by not dressing in mourning clothes, and Joanna gave birth eighteen days later to her son, Sabastian.[5] Devastated with grief upon learning of the tragic death of her husband, Joanna vowed to wear mourning clothes for the remainder of her life. Joanna's dress from that time forward was always black. Initially, the black garments signified her perpetual mourning, but later, the black represented her vow of poverty.[6] In the sixteenth century, aristocratic widows traditionally began their mourning by being isolated in their houses or chambers.[7] Joanna's actions and the temporary depression she experienced during this time were thought to be reminiscent of her grandmother, who was known as Joanna the Mad.[8] Joanna's widowhood, similar to most widows, was complicated by a series of other losses within the same timeframe.

The prevailing model of the widow in the treatise and manuals advocated that they retreat to a cloister and isolate themselves, but Joanna was never given that option. She had no choice but to accept the destiny her father and brother carved out for her, that of a pawn on a political chessboard.[9] Five short months after losing her husband, Joanna suffered another loss when she was forced to leave Portugal without her five-month-old

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[5] Encyclopedia.com, "Joanna of Austria (1535-1573)," Encyclopedia.com, https://www.encyclopedia.com/women/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/joanna-austria-1535-1573.

[6] Rosa Helena Chinchilla, "Juana of Austria: Courtly Spain and Devotional Expression," *Renaissance and Reformation* 28, no. 1 (2004): 22.

[7] Encyclopedia of European Social History, "Almanacs, Transcripts, and Maps," Encyclopedia, http://www.encyclopedia.com/international/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/widows-and-widowers.

[8] Encyclopedia.com, "Joanna of Austria (1535-1573)," Encyclopedia.com, https://www.encyclopedia.com/women/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/joanna-austria-1535-1573.

[9] Perez, *The Making of Juana of Austria*, 142.

son.[10] Joanna was asked to return to Spain to govern as regent while her brother Philip went off to England to marry. Since her son Sebastian was the heir to the throne, the Portuguese would not permit her to take him.[11] Joanna missed her son immensely and wore a heavy veil to isolate herself from others.[12] She never saw her son again, further compounding her grief.[13] After becoming widowed in January (1554) and leaving her son, ten months later in the same year, she suffered the loss of her grandmother, Queen Joanna I, in April (1555) and her father in September (1558).[14]

Experiencing multiple losses within a short period can lead to a prolonged state of mourning and bereavement overload. The pain of the first grief is compounded by the subsequent one, leaving no time for any of the losses to be fully mourned. Contributing factors related to the bereaved person include a personal or family history of mental illness, previous traumatic experiences, and sudden or unexpected death.[15] Much like Princess Joanna, history records her grandmother, Queen Joanna, experienced mental, emotional, and psychological anguish triggered by the death of her husband and complicated by political crisis and multiple losses.

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[10] Perez, *The Making of Juana of Austria*, 12.

[11] Encyclopedia.com, "Joanna of Austria (1535-1573)," Encyclopedia.com, https://www.encyclopedia.com/women/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/joanna-austria-1535-1573.

[12] Perez, *The Making of Juana of Austria*, 64.

[13] Thomas Worcester, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 430–431, https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=5046548.

[14] Rosa Helena Chinchilla, "Juana of Austria: Courtly Spain and Devotional Expression," *Renaissance and Reformation* 28, no. 1 (2004): 24.

[15] Mary Tobin, Sharon Lambert, and John McCarthy, "Grief, Tragic Death, and Multiple Loss in the Lives of Irish Traveller Community Health Workers," *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying* 81, no. 1 (May 1, 2020): 130–54, https://doi.org/10.1177/0030222818762969.

Queen Joanna I (1479 – 1555)

Queen Joanna I, historically known as Joanna the Mad, was the queen of Castile, the mother of emperor Charles V, second daughter of King Ferdinand II and Queen Isabella I. She was married to the Austrian archduke, Philip the Handsome.[16] The death of her only brother and eldest sister, followed by the death of her infant nephew, positioned Queen Joanna I as the heiress of the Spanish kingdoms.[17] In 1502, not long after she and her husband were recognized as the future sovereigns, Joanna's reason began to wane, and her mental imbalance was obvious.[18] With the subsequent death of her mother in November of 1504, Joanna inherited the crown of Castile, but by this time, her violent mental instability was well known.[19] It had rendered her incapable of ruling the kingdom. In addition to the multiple family losses Joanna suffered, her husband was away in another country. She was fully aware of his many infidelities when she joined him, and displays of her passionate jealousy caused some deplorable scenes.

Philip's unfaithfulness, along with the tumultuous events of a contested succession and a shipwreck off the English coast, after which Juana and Philip became the guests of Henry VII at Windsor, left her unable to govern. In September of 1506, after

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[16] Thomas Dandelet and Bethany Aram, "Juana the Mad: Sovereignty and Dynasty in Renaissance Europe," *Renaissance Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (2006): 543–44, https://doi.org/10.1353/ren.2008.0267.

[17] Perez, *The Making of Juana of Austria*, 47.

[18] Encyclopedia Britannica, "Joan: Queen of Castile and Aragon," Encyclopedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Joan-queen-of-Castile-and-Aragon.

[19] Gordon Campbell, "Juana I, La Loca or Joanna the Mad," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Renaissance* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780198601753.013.2017.

a five-day battle with typhoid fever,[20] Philip died, and Joanna became a widow at twenty-seven years old.[21] The shock of her husband's sudden death caused Joanna's melancholia to intensify to the point she became completely deranged, clinging to Philip's embalmed body and refusing to be separated from it.[22] Philip's burial was delayed because of the excessive and extravagant manner in which Joanna mourned over him. Joanna lived out the last forty-nine years of her tormented life in isolation at Tordesillas (near Valladolid), nominally as queen (her name always appeared beside that of her son Charles in public documents), but she was, in fact, incapable of understanding affairs of state; she died on April 11, 1555.[23]

Joanna, the Mad Queen, seemed to manifest symptoms of complicated grief, as evidenced by her erratic and bizarre behaviors. Her unrelenting yearning for her husband, intense loneliness, and inability to care for herself or others indicate such.[24] History records three generations of widowhood and mental instability in this family, beginning with Queen Isabella, Queen Joanna I, and Princess Joanna. Historians have ascribed some

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[20] Gordon Campbell, "Philip I, the Handsome," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Renaissance* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), https://www-oxfordreference-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/acref/9780198601753.001.0001/acref-9780198601753-e-2810.

[21] Thomas Dandelet and Bethany Aram, "Juana the Mad: Sovereignty and Dynasty in Renaissance Europe," *Renaissance Quarterly* 59, no. 5 (2006): 543, https://doi.org/10.1353/ren.2008.0267.

[22] Encyclopedia Britannica, "Joan: Queen of Castile and Aragon," Encyclopedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Joan-queen-of-Castile-and-Aragon.

[23] Gordon Campbell, "Juana I, La Loca or Joanna the Mad," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Renaissance* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), https://www-oxfordreference-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/acref/9780198601753.001.0001/acref-9780198601753-e-2017.

[24] Mary Tobin, Sharon Lambert, and John McCarthy, "Grief, Tragic Death, and Multiple Loss in the Lives of Irish Traveller Community Health Workers," *OMEGA – Journal of Death and Dying* 81, no. 1 (2020): 64, https://doi.org/10.1177/0030222818762969.

degree of mental condition to them all, ranging from depression to schizophrenia, all triggered by a series of losses and culminating in the death of their husbands.

Princess Joanna of Austria was a profoundly religious woman. Despite her grief, her life took a different path after the death of her husband than that of her family members who preceded her. Joanna moved to Portugal and ruled the country from 1554 to 1559 as her father's representative and her brother's (Philip II) regent. As a regent in Spain, Joanna zealously encouraged her court to infuse religion into their courtly life. She was captivated by a Jesuit named Francis Borgia and by other early Jesuits in Spain whose writings promoted religious reform, and she became a vital patroness. Borgia was her principal religious advisor, who taught her that her principal earthly duty was to seek her own salvation and that of her subjects.[25] Leading by example, she strove for queenly austerity and a serious devotional attitude toward prayer, and she requested twice-daily visits from Borgia for religious guidance.[26] This is the beginning of her pursuit to become a member of the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits.

To provide the context for Juana's Jesuit journey, familiarization with the founder and a few key terms and phrases defined by George Traub in "Do You Speak Ignatian?" provides insight into the Jesuits' origins and mission.

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[25] Rosa Helena Chinchilla, "Juana of Austria: Courtly Spain and Devotional Expression," *Renaissance and Reformation* 28, no. 1 (2004): 21.

[26] Rosa Helena Chinchilla, "Juana of Austria: Courtly Spain and Devotional Expression," *Renaissance and Reformation* 28, no. 1 (2004): 23.

Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556)

Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, was born the thirteenth child into a noble and wealthy Basque family.[27] He was not an overly pious young man and was fond of the world, its amusement, and pleasures. He joined the Spanish army and gained some military notoriety in an attack on the small town of Najara.[28] In the battle of Pamplona, he suffered life-changing injuries when a cannonball shattered his one leg and ripped the flesh off his other leg, leaving him bedridden for over a year. During his long recovery, Ignatius asked for romance novels but had to settle for the only available books, The Flowers of the Saints and The Life of Christ by Ludolph of Saxony, in which the name "Jesuit" occurs.[29] Reading these books had a transformative effect on Ignatius, who wanted to do something for God.

Sufficiently restored to health, Ignatius set out on a spiritual journey that led him to spend nearly a year in the small town of Manresa. There, he engaged in a radical, disciplined regimen of long hours of prayer, fasting, and self-flagellation that was extreme even for the sixteenth century. Before seeking guidance and tempering his austerities, Ignatius experienced a spiritual and physiological crisis that took him to the brink of suicide. He recaptured his peace and serenity by returning to his inner inspiration, enabling him to speak to and help others.[30] Ignatius' genuine conversion led

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[27] Edward A. Ryan, "St. Ignatius of Loyola," Encyclopedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/biography/St-Ignatius-of-Loyola.

[28] Thomas J. Campbell, *The Jesuits, 1534-1921: A History of the Society of Jesus from Its Foundation to the Present Time* (New York, NY: Good Press, 2022), 11.

[29] Campbell, *The Jesuits, 1534-1921*, 11.

[30] John W. O'Malley, *The Jesuits: A History from Ignatius to the Present* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 7.

him to spend days confessing his sins, nights in prayer, and time in a cave where he penned the "Spiritual Exercises."[31]

Ignatius felt a call to the priesthood but needed to be sufficiently educated to fulfill the requirements. He chose to defer this goal for more than twelve years and to undergo the classroom struggle at an age when most men have long since finished their training.[32] Thus, he began his academic journey by studying Latin with school-age boys in Barcelona. Eventually, he traveled to Europe to complete his formal education at the University of Paris. While studying in Paris, Ignatius met six like-minded men (Nicholas Bobadilla, Peter Faber, Diego Laynez, Simao Rodrigues, and Alfonso Solmeron) who joined together and called themselves Friends of the Lord.[33] Upon completing their studies, they traveled to Italy to offer themselves to the Pope with plans to travel to the Holy Land. Pope Paul III granted their request, paid for the trip, and permitted them to form a religious order. In 1537, Ignatius and his friends were officially ordained to the priesthood. In 1534, Ignatius and six others pronounced vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience and formed the Society of Jesus. On September 27, 1540, Pope Paul III made the Society of Jesus an official religious order in the Catholic Church, and Ignatius was appointed the first Father General.[34]

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[31] Campbell, *The Jesuits, 1534-1921*, 12.

[32] Edward A. Ryan, "St. Ignatius of Loyola," Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/biography/St-Ignatius-of-Loyola.

[33] Gordon Campbell, "Ignatius Loyola or (Spanish) Ignacio de Loyola," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Renaissance* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), https://www-oxfordreference-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/display/10.1093/acref/9780198601753.001.0001/acref-9780198601753-e-1907.

[34] Markus Friedrich and John Noël Dillon, *The Jesuits: A History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022), 3.

Definitions and Phrases

The noun Jesuit refers to members of the Society of Jesus. The term originally carried a negative connotation for people who felt it was arrogant to call itself the Company or Society of Jesus when other orders were named after their founder ("Benedictines," "Franciscans," "Dominicans"). The term was eventually viewed favorably and adopted by the Society itself.[35]

The Society of Jesus refers to a Catholic religious order of men founded in 1540 by Ignatius of Loyola and a small group of multinationals, "friends in the Lord," fellow students from the University of Paris. They saw their mission as being available to go anywhere and do anything to "help souls," especially where the need was greatest (e.g., where certain people or a certain kind of work were neglected).[36]

Zeal for souls, like the phrase "helping souls," points to the active and pastoral nature of the Society of Jesus. It describes diverse Jesuit ministries, including education, spiritual direction, and missionary work. The phrase "zeal for souls" can be traced to a sermon by Gregory the Great, which is often associated with Ignatius and ingrained in the Society's vocabulary.[37] Pastoral Ministry was the mission of the early Society of Jesus, which took a fundamentally pastoral and apostolic approach to all of its works despite its heavy commitment to schools and education.[38] Laity (lay person/lay people) are the

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[35] George Traub, *Do You Speak Ignatian?: A Glossary of Terms Used in Ignatian and Jesuit Circles* (Cincinnati, OH: Xavier University, 1997), 8, https://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/ignatian-resources/do-you-speak ignatian.

[36] Traub*, Do You Speak Ignatian?*, 18.

[37] Thomas Worcester, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 854, https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=5046548.

[38] Traub, *Do You Speak Ignatian?*, 13.

people of a religious faith distinguished from its clergy; within Catholic circles, members of religious communities who are not ordained (i.e., "sisters" and "brothers") are often associated with priests and bishops and not with lay people.[39]

Ignatian is from the word Ignatius (of Loyola). It is sometimes used in distinction with Jesuit, indicating aspects of spirituality that derive from Ignatius, the layperson, rather than from the later Ignatius and his religious order, the Society of Jesus.[40] Spiritual Exercises are various methods or activities for opening oneself to God's spirit and allowing one's whole being, not just the mind, to be affected. Some of these methods are more "active' and others are more "passive." Examples include vocal praying (The Lord's Prayer), meditation or contemplation, journaling, listening to music, or walking amid nature.[41] The purpose of all these activities is to discontinue one's usual productive activities and allow God to "speak," listening to what God may be "saying."

Examen is a method of prayer Ignatius taught in his Spiritual Exercises, and he considered it the most important thing a person could do daily.[42] A contemporary adaptation broadens the traditional "Examination of Conscience" (preparation for confession) into the "Examination of Consciousness." This prayer has five steps:

1. Pray for light to understand and appreciate the past day.
2. Review the day in thanksgiving.
3. Review the feelings in the replay of the day.

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[39] Traub, *Do You Speak Ignatian?*, 10.

[40] Traub, *Do You Speak Ignatian?*, 6.

[41] Traub, *Do You Speak Ignatian?*, 19.

[42] Traub, *Do You Speak Ignatian?*, 4.

4. Choose one of those feelings (positive or negative) and pray from it.
5. Look toward tomorrow.[43]

The last phrase, "Finding God in All Things," sums up Ignatian spirituality. It invites a person to search for and find God in every circumstance of life, not just in explicitly religious situations or activities such as prayer in church or in private. It implies that God is present everywhere and, though invisible, can be "found" in all the creatures God has made. They reveal at least a little of what their maker is like—often by arousing wonder in those who can look with the "eyes of faith." It is said after a long day at work, Ignatius would open the French windows in his room, look up at the stars, and be carried out of himself into the greatness of God.[44]

The Jesuits

The Society of Jesus (S.J.), also known as the Jesuits, was a Roman Catholic order for religious men founded by Ignatius of Loyola, a Spanish nobleman, and his companions. Pope Paul III formally approved the religious order on September 27, 1540.[45] The chief purpose of this newly founded order was to strive for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine and the propagation of the faith.[46] From its inception, the principle work of the Jesuits was education and scholarship.[47] Champions of the

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[43] Traub, *Do You Speak Ignatian?*, 4.

[44] Traub, *Do You Speak Ignatian?*, 4.

[45] Encyclopedia Britannica, "Jesuit Religious Order," https://www.britannica.com/topic/Jesuits.

[46] John W. O'Malley, *Saints or Devils Incarnate?: Studies in Jesuit History*, vol. 1 (Boston, MA: Brill, 2013), 38, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=1367827.

[47] Encyclopedia Britannica, "Jesuit Religious Order," https://www.britannica.com/topic/Jesuits.

marginalized, from the onset, the Jesuits partnered with institutions engaged in social assistance. The commitment from the beginning was to the poor, sick, and other groups on the margins of society. Commitment to the works of social assistance, of various kinds, was at the heart of Ignatius's establishment of the Society of Jesus.[48] Near the end of Ignatius's life, he bequeathed what is called his autobiography to the Society of Jesus. In it, he depicted himself as a person moved to action for the "help of souls" by a series of profound religious experiences.[49] The Help of Souls best captures the mission of the first Jesuits.[50]

Ignatius's correspondence totaled over 7,000 letters, and the words "serve the church" never appear in his writings, but on nearly every page, the words "help of souls" appear.[51] In the year the order was established (1540), Ignatius was instrumental in founding an orphanage in Rome and, shortly after, Casa Santa Marta, a refuge for prostitutes seeking to change their lives.[52] Jesuits who founded the order saw compassion for the poor and oppressed as the most genuine expression of Christian sentiment, and they tried to help others practice the spiritual and corporal works of mercy such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting prisoners, and visiting the ignorant.[53]

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[48] O'Malley*, Saints or Devils Incarnate?: Studies in Jesuit History*, 1:44.

[49] O'Malley, *Saints or Devils Incarnate?*, 1:4.

[50] O'Malley, *Saints or Devils Incarnate?*, 1:77.

[51] O'Malley, *Saints or Devils Incarnate?*, 1:41.

[52] O'Malley, *Saints or Devils Incarnate?*, 1:43.

[53] O'Malley, *Saints or Devils Incarnate?*, 1:57.

Women and the Jesuits

From the inception of the Jesuits, women were excluded except for four relatively unknown women: Joanna of Austria, Isabel Roser, Lucrezia di Bradine, and Francisca Cruyllas.[54] In 1545, Isabel Roser and her two other companions pronounced vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience to Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits. At that point, these three sixteenth-century women were considered to be Jesuits.[55] According to Dr. Lisa Fullam, Isabel Rosa was a noblewoman who shared a long-time friendship with Ignatius, dating back to when he studied in Barcelona. She was also a long-time benefactor who actively elicited support from wealthy women in Barcelona on behalf of Ignatius and his young Society. Rosa's husband died in 1541, and the following year, she expressed her desire to live in Rome under the obedience to Ignatius, and he expressed his skepticism, but she persisted.[56]

After writing of her lack of attachment and disdain for her possessions, Rosa arrived with her friends, a shipload full of her personal property, and her servants. Sincere in her desire to be of service, she was tasked with establishing and managing the first house of Saint Martha. Rosa petitioned Pope Paul III to be admitted to the Society of Jesus, and her request was granted on Christmas Day, 1545.[57] She and her friends vowed perpetual poverty, chastity, and obedience. Once becoming a member of the Jesuit, Isabel became overbearing, making impossible demands, continued in her ways, and demanded

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[54] Lisa Fullam, "Juana S. J.: The Past (and Future?) Status of Women in the Society of Jesuits," in *Studies in Spirituality of Jesuits* (St. Louis, MO: Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality, 1999), 22.

[55] Fullam, "Juana S. J.," 3.

[56] John Padberg, "A Woman Jesuit: Secret, Perilous Project," *Company SJ Magazine* (February 13, 2000): 2.

[57] Fullam, "Juana S. J.," 17.

that Ignatius provide her with more hours of spiritual direction than the other Jesuits combined.[58]

This experiment lasted less than six months before Ignatius petitioned Pope Paul III to request the women be released from their vows because they could not fulfill the fourth vow, always being mobile and able to go from one part of the world to another.[59] The fact that women could not travel alone to fulfill this vow was the justification Ignatius used to have women's rights revoked. A formal request was made that the Society be exempt from the obligation to undertake the permanent care of women, including women who wished to join the Society. In 1549, Ignatius' request was granted. From then forward, Ignatius did not acknowledge, recognize, or regard the three women as Jesuits.[60] The Jesuits were free in perpetuity from the spiritual direction of women living together in the community or wishing to be under the obedience of the Society.[61]

Joanna the Jesuit Princess

Princess Joanna of Spain was the fourth woman to become a member of the Society of Jesus, and her experience differed vastly from that of the other three women who preceded her ten years earlier. Thrust into the role of Regent of Spain when her brother Philip II was in England with his wife Mary Tudor months after the death of her

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[58] John Padberg, "A Woman Jesuit: Secret, Perilous Project," *Company SJ Magazine* (February 13, 2000): 2.

[59] Fullam, "Juana S. J.," 20.

[60] Fullam, "Juana S. J.," 4.

[61] Thomas Worcester, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 431, https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=5046548.

husband, she was an effective leader of Spain. Joanna's spirituality was deeply felt, and the pastoral assistance aspects of the Jesuits and their mission to help souls resonated with her. She also had a secret ambition to become a member of the Society. The only person Joanna informed of her desire to be a Jesuit was her long-time spiritual advisor, Francis Borgia, one of the early Jesuits. She knew her father, Emperor Charles, and brother Philip would be furious with her and the Jesuits if she vowed to live a life of purity and thwarted the possibility of her remarrying and forging a dynastic political alliance.[62]

Keenly aware of her royal position and power, Joanna was determined to be a Jesuit, and she used her influence to compel the Jesuit leadership to accept her as a member.[63] Her request to join the Jesuits placed the Jesuit leadership in a precarious position, prompting a covert, hushed debate. Admitting Joanna would enrage her father, Emperor Charles, who was no fan of the Jesuits, and refusing membership to the Regent of Spain could have grave consequences and jeopardize the work of the Society.[64] Ignatius appointed a committee to advise him, and the proceedings were so discreet there is no surviving Jesuit correspondence of Joanna's name or title. Only her alias name, Mateo Sanchez, was used. After much deliberation, the Jesuits' recommendation, and the

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[62] Thomas Worcester, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 431, https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=5046548.

[63] Encyclopedia.com, "Joanna of Austria (1535-1573)," Encyclopedia.com, https://www.encyclopedia.com/women/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/joanna-austria-1535-1573.

[64] Gemma Simmonds, "Women Jesuits?," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1, https://www.creighton.edu/sites/default/files/2022-01/25-Women-Jesuits.pdf.

pope's authorization, Ignatius admitted Joanna under the assumed male name of Mateo Sanchez as a Lay Scholastic.[65]

This arrangement was so secret that Joanna's brother Phillip II did not know. Upon his return to Spain, he grew angry about Joanna's frequent visits with her spiritual mentor, Borgia, which spawned rumors that she was his mistress.[66] As a scholastic, Joanna (Mateo) was considered a Jesuit novice who had completed two years and taken vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. Uniquely and unambiguously, the emperor's daughter and sister of the king was an official lifetime member of the Jesuits. Joanna was the Jesuit Princess, the only female Jesuit in the history of the Society of Jesus.[67]

Joanna's most important personal project as a Jesuit was constructing the convent/palace of the Descalzas Reales in Madrid. Joanna's vision for the complex was to focus on both religious court life and charitable work, including a college education for orphaned girls and providing health care and lodging for the most needy.[68] This religious-social complex included a palace/monastery, a hospital, a house of mercy, and a school for orphan girls.[69] Her palace-monastery was also a retirement place fit for noble and

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[65] Perez, *The Making of Juana of Austria*, 81.

[66] Encyclopedia.com, "Joanna of Austria (1535-1573)," Encyclopedia.com, https://www.encyclopedia.com/women/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/joanna-austria-1535-1573.

[67] Friedrich and Dillon, *The Jesuits: A History*, 29.

[68] Perez, *The Making of Juana of Austria*, 2.

[69] Perez, *The Making of Juana of Austria*, 17.

royal women. Many of the first women's convents were founded by widows, and by the sixteenth century, it was not uncommon to take in wealthy widows as lodgers.[70]

Conclusion

Joanna was a sixteenth-century widow who defied the gender-imposed social and cultural norms of her day. As an effective ruler and the only female Jesuit, she represents a resilient woman who broke through the glass ceiling of an all-male religious order. Joanna found in the Jesuits a community of support that provided her with the spiritual and social support she needed during her bereavement period. Research points to social support being a protective factor for widows' resilience.[71] It also indicates social support from family and friends after the death of a husband, helps widows to recover from the grief of loss and makes their psychological well-being better. The two concepts of capacity that involve resilience embody the life of Joanna, her relationship with Francis Borgia, and with the Jesuits:

> Resilience involves two concepts of capacity; the first is being able to face, cope with, and adjust to stressful or traumatic conditions. The second is reconditioning oneself to be able to develop positively, including self-confidence, self-control, acceptance of change, and optimism believes that any support given to a widow can restore her confidence and increase her sense of belonging to society and is often achieved through close and intimate relationships between the widow and important people in her life.[72]

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[70] Encyclopedia of European Social History, "Almanacs, Transcripts, and Maps," Encyclopedia, http://www.encyclopedia.com/international/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/widows-and-widowers.

[71] Putri Awaliah, Ridha Adenika, and Dian Veronika Sakti Kaloeti, "Social Support as A Protective Factor for Widows' Resilience: A Systematic Literature Review," in *Proceedings of International Conference on Psychological Studies (ICPSYCHE)*, vol. 4 (International Conference on Psychological Studies, Semarang, Indonesia, 2023), 413, https://proceedings.collabryzk.com/index.php/icpsyche/issue/view/icpsyche-2023.

[72] Awaliah, Adenika, and Kaloeti, "Social Support as A Protective Factor for Widows' Resilience," 413.

Joanna's capacity to cope with widowhood while ruling Spain during tumultuous times displayed remarkable resilience, demonstrating her ability to accept change and engendered self-confidence. Her relationship with the Jesuits increased her sense of belonging and gave Joanna a greater sense of purpose beyond her political achievements. She embraced the "help for souls" mission of the Jesuits as her own personal mission, evidenced by the focus on her charitable acts. Joanna's relationship with the Jesuits was mutually beneficial. Joanna's political status, influence, and financial support helped the Society of Jesus to grow exponentially, exceeding the growth of other religious orders during that time.

A historical glimpse of Joanna's heritage showed signs of transgenerational trauma. The patterns of psychological and emotional effects of other widows in her ancestral lineage are well documented by historians. On the other hand, Joanna's widowhood highlights the neglected needs of the widows, namely, the lack of understanding and insensitivity to her concerns are revealed. The mental and emotional anguish Joanna experienced after the death of her husband and leaving her only child in Portugal was referred to as the "extremes of widowhood."[73]

Today, the extremes of widowhood could be described as bereavement overload. A term coined by psychologist and gerontologist Robert Kastenbaum, it occurs after multiple losses in quick succession and no time to grieve in between. The table below chronicles Princess Joanna's life and highlights the primary and secondary losses she experienced within a compressed timeframe.

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[73] Perez, *The Making of Juana of Austria*, 79.

Table 2. Princess Joanna's Loss History Graph

1535	0	Birth	Born in Madrid to Emperor Charles V and Isabella of Portugal.
1539	4	Loss of Mother	Isabella dies; Juana is raised by court tutors.
1552	16	Marriage	Marries Joao Manuel, Prince of Portugal
1554	18	Widowhood and Motherhood	Husband dies; she gives birth to son Sebastian 18 days later. Wore black for the remainder of her life.
1554	18	Loss of court life to become Regent of Spain	Leaves five-month son in Portugal; begins lifelong mourning.
1554-1559	18-24	Regent of Spain	Governs Spain while brother is abroad.
1555	20	Secret Jesuit Membership	Joins Society of Jesus under the alias Mateo Sanchez – Only female Jesuit.
1557	22	Convent Founded	Establishes Convent in Madrid.
1564	29	Moves to Convent	Begins living at convent, blending courtly and spiritual life
1573	38	Death	Dies and is buried in convent she founded.

Joanna's prolonged illness, refusal to eat, long hours of weeping, and praying were interpreted as signs of madness. Joanna's insistence on several accommodations as a condition for moving to Spain to take up regency indicates a self-awareness of her unique needs. She requested to live in a convent connected to the court to ensure the seclusion is appropriate to the widow.

The life of Joanna, the Jesuit princess, and her relationship with the Society of Jesus exemplify the importance of spiritual and social support in the life of a widow. Her

life story illustrates the necessity for pastoral care and a sustained community of support. Joanna the Jesuit aptly serves as an appropriate historical figure for this project, "Widowhood and The Role of Pastoral Care in Establishing A Community of Support."

The next chapter, Chapter Four, Theological Foundations, examines the core tenets of Womanist Theology, its origins, and its historical evolution. The communion of the saints is introduced from a womanist perspective as a theological framework for understanding pastoral care and communal responsibility for caring for widows.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

To fully grasp the role of pastoral care in establishing a community of support for those who have lost a spouse, one must first understand their needs. This research addresses widowhood within a context that has lacked awareness of a widow's ongoing needs. A widow's needs are not just complicated based on their gender, but race and socioeconomic class are also relevant factors that intensify and exacerbate the grief and bereavement process. This chapter examined the communion of the saints and Womanist Theology because both explicitly focus on the demographic I endeavor to reach. This theology also empowers my ministry context by raising its sensitivity and awareness of how it can elevate the lives of widows.

This chapter briefly examined God's special attention and care for widows in the Old and New Testaments and highlighted Black Liberation and Feminist Theology. Both theologies expose injustice and patriarchal structures. Black Liberation Theology highlighted racial oppression through the lens of Black males, and the Feminist Theology focused on gender from a predominantly white female view. Absent from both discourses was the voice of African American women, which was either excluded or minimized. The Womanist Theology intersects race, gender, and class, specifically giving agency to marginalized African American women.

The challenges of widowhood have existed since death entered the world through sin. Since Eve was blamed for Adam's fall in Genesis, women have been viewed as inferior and have become increasingly marginalized.[1] The patriarchal structure of the ancient world contributed to the precarious situation in which widows found themselves upon the death of their husbands. Women typically married in their early teens, leaving the safety and well-being of their father's protection for that of their husband's.[2] The woman's place in society was dependent on the status of her husband, and when he died, her financial security, social status, and legal protections also died. Consequently, the loss of a husband in the Old Testament was often devastating, and scholars estimate that one-quarter of the Hebrew women became widows because of sickness or war.[3]

Deprived of family protection, financial support, and social standing, widows were marginalized, ostracized, and rendered voiceless. Vulnerable and easily exploited, widows along with orphans and the oppressed, formed a trifecta to whom God showed deference and personally mandated that they be the recipients of special care. Widows were considered disadvantaged members of society, and scriptures repeatedly emphasized God's demand that they be afforded economic provision and legal protection.[4] Jeremiah Unterman highlights God's concern for the plight of widows, as

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[1] Angelo Nicolaides, "A Critical Investigation into the Role of Widows in Early Church Life," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 103 (2022): 1, https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.1032.

[2] Strawn, "Widow," 1164.

[3] Strawn, "Widow," 1164.

[4] Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, Andrea L. Weiss, and Women of Reform Judaism (U.S.), *The Torah: A Woman's Commentary* (New York, NY: Women of Reform Judaism, 2018), 1102.

shown in Deuteronomy 10:18 and Psalm 68:5, where God is portrayed as their champion.[5]

Conversely, in Exodus 22:21-22, God warns that he would not tolerate the mistreatment of widows and would personally inflict punishment on anyone who exploits them. The Contemporary Torah implicitly directs the warnings about the widow's care to the "communal leaders," noting that the responsibility for assisting and protecting widows in ancient Israel rested with local householders, elders, priests, and the king.[6] Contemporary church leadership bears the same obligation to ensure widows are cared for, yet despite the biblical mandate, widows' needs remain neglected and unmet. Thus, the hypothesis holds that ministry leaders who participate in workshops will gain a greater understanding of widows and become more sensitive and responsive to their needs. James H. Cone's insistence that God sides with the oppressed and the downtrodden[7] reframes the widows' neglect as a failure of leadership and laity.

Black Liberation Theology

From a Black Theology or Black Liberation Theology perspective, biblical mandates reveal that God's concern for widows is not merely individual charitable acts but structural and a matter of justice. Black Liberation Theology is the predecessor to the Womanist Theology that will be examined in light of the neglected widows. Black

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[5] Jeremiah Unterman, *Justice for All: How the Jewish Bible Revolutionized Ethics* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 72.

[6] David E. S. Stein, *The Contemporary Torah: A* Gender-*Sensitive Adaptation of the JPS Translation* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2006), 123.

[7] James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation: 50th Anniversary Edition*, 50th Anniversary (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2020), 25.

Liberation Theology is the theological construct of Dr. James H. Cone, the father of Black theology in the modern era.[8] Cone produced the first academic work to merge the contemporaneous struggles for racial, political, and socioeconomic equality with the critical concerns of Christian systematic theology.[9] Motivated during the turmoil, unrest, and social change during the Civil Rights Movement and influenced by Dr. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, Dr. Cone's groundbreaking publications, *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969), and *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970) transformed theologians' thinking on oppression, injustice, and how God related to Blacks in America. Dr. Cone's theology had its roots in the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah, where God says the prophet was anointed to preach good tidings to the poor, bind up the brokenhearted, and set those who are held captive at liberty. He also maintained that liberation theology and Christian Theology share three prevalent themes: liberation, transformation, and reconciliation.

The words of Reverend Jeremiah Wright expressed it best: "The Black church taught me that transformation was God's desire for positive, meaningful, and permanent change. God does not want the powerless masses (the poor, the widows, the marginalized, and those underserved by the powerful few) to stay locked into sick systems that treat some in society as being "more equal" than others in the same society."[10] Cone's breakthrough in Black Liberation Theology brought attention to the

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[8] Dwight N. Hopkins and Edward P. Antonio, *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 184.

[9] Juan Floyd-Thomas, "Liberation in African American Theology," in *The Oxford Handbook of African American Theology* (July 1, 2014): 202, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199755653.013.0014.

[10] Hopkins and Antonio, *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*, 195.

marginalized men who were invisible and gave voice to the voiceless.[11] Cone's theology was not without opposition and criticism. One of the criticisms lodged against Black Liberation Theology is its patriarchy, and like feminist theology, it excluded Black women and their struggles. Black women's struggles were relegated to the background, secondary, or invisible. Black women's issues, widowhood, caregiving, emotional labor, and existence within secular and ecclesial circles were absent from Cone's theology. Cone's Black Liberation Theology highlights oppression, but it offers limited resources for addressing gender oppression and any dimensions helpful to the marginalization of widows. In parallel with the rise of Black Liberation Theology, there was the Feminist Theology and the women's liberation movement. Focused on the marginalized women, they also failed to address issues of African American women; their emphasis was from the perspective of white women.[12]

The women's liberation movement gained greater visibility at the end of the 1960s, as societal norms and long-held values were questioned. The Civil Rights Movement, Black Liberation Theology, and the Feminist Movement, all focused on social justice, and significantly influenced Feminist Theology. Coinciding with these movements, Euro-American feminist theology was being developed and written by educated, economically privileged, middle-class white North American Christian women.[13] Feminist Theology looks at the patriarchal interpretations of scriptures, gender inequality, and how religion has marginalized women. Feminists tended to look at

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[11] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 21–22.

[12] Stephanie V. Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 3.

[13] Lucy Tatman, "Euro-American Feminist Theology," in *Women and Religion in North America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 1173.

Deborah, Abigail, and Sarah as role models of liberated women who found freedom.[14] Feminist theology only addressed the needs of white women and their histories. Abigail, the only widow among the three, is remembered for her life before her husband Nabal's death, neglecting the realities of her suffering as a widow. Feminist theology excluded the voices of Black women and neglected to include their oppressive experiences.[15]

Delores Williams was one of many who defined the necessity of theological analysis beyond that of White women.[16] A pioneer in the Womanist Theology, Delores Williams asserts that Christian Feminist Theology was developed by white women exclusively for gender oppression. It centered on patriarchy, male control, dominance, and preference throughout all institutions of society. Womanist Theology is described as theology done by Black women that goes beyond the feminist issue of sexism but includes racism and classism.[17] It is often referred to as the triple oppressions, class, race, and gender, which distinguish the lived experiences of African American women from those of their white counterparts. According to Ruth Barton, the most glaring difference between feminists and womanists is that Black women face three levels of oppression (racism, sexism, classism) and come from a "mule of the world" experience in contrast to white women's one-dimensional fight against the Victorian model of a weak, pampered

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[14] Ruth Haley Barton, "A Comparison and Contrast of Womanist and Feminist Theology and Experience," *Christians for Biblical Equality* 9, no. 4 (October 1995): 10.

[15] Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology*, 4.

[16] Delores S. Williams, "The Color of Feminism: Or Speaking the Black Woman's Tongue," *Journal of Religious Thought* 1, no. 43 (1986): 52.

[17] William A. Dyrness et al., *Global Dictionary of Theology: A Resource for the Worldwide Church* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 771.

woman who cannot do anything.[18] Burton cites spiritual survival as a distinguishing feature of Womanist Theology. Feminists highlight Deborah, Abigail, and Sarah while womanists resonate with Hagar's struggle to survive. With Feminist Theology centered on gender and Liberation Theology largely focused on Black men, this gap was the impetus that led to the emergence of the Womanist Theology.

Womanist Theology

The Womanist Theology gives voice to the marginalized and provides a perspective on the challenges widows face through the lens of women of color. Womanist theology is an offspring of Black Liberation Theology and feminist theology's failure to include the experiences, needs, and concerns of Black and brown women. Womanist Theology is considered the most significant contribution to Black religious scholarship since its emergence in the mid-1980s. Unlike Black Liberation Theology and Feminist Theology, womanists focused on the lived experience of Black women. Womanists have primarily focused on Black women's experience of racism, sexism, misogyny, and economic exploitation during and after American slavery.[19] The womanist theological perspective is one-way Black theologies have grown and expanded over time. It opposes all forms of oppression, and according to Layli Phillips, womanism is broadly defined as:

> Womanism is a social change perspective rooted in Black woman's and other women of color's everyday experiences and everyday methods of problem solving in everyday spaces, extended to the problem of ending all forms of

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[18] Ruth Haley Barton, "A Comparison and Contrast of Womanist and Feminist Theology and Experience," *Christians for Biblical Equality* 9, no. 4 (October 1995): 10.

[19] Rufus Burrow, "Development of Womanist Theology: Some Chief Characteristics," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 54, no. 1 (1999): 42.

> oppression for all people, restoring the balance between people and the environment/nature, and reconciling human life with the spiritual dimensions.[20]

Phillips further asserts womanism reaches beyond classic Black Theology and aims to be universal, expanding its anti-oppression arc into politics, empathy, and activism.[21] It was Black female scholars who were dissatisfied that their voices and lived experiences were not represented in these newly developed theologies. The womanist theology was pioneered by Delores Williams, Katie Connon, Emilie Townes, Kelly Brown Douglas, and Renita Weems, among others, who have adopted and adapted the term womanism, coined by Alice Walker, as the best way to characterize their work and ministry. Alice Walker in her book, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983). Walker's defines womanist in a four-part definition:

1. Womanist 1. From womanish. (Opp. of "girlish," i.e. frivolous, irresponsible, not serious) A Black feminist or feminist of color. From the Black folk expression of mothers to female children, "you acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another Black folk expression. You trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. Serious.

2. Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter) and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist, as in: "Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?" Ans.: "Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented." Traditionally capable, as in: "Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me." Reply: "It wouldn't be the first time."

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[20] Hopkins and Antonio, *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*, 172.

[21] Hopkins and. Antonio, *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*, 173.

3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless.

4. Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender. (in Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose, xi-xii).[22]

Alice Walker points out that women in the womanist tradition have generally been mentally-emotionally strong, self-determined, survivalist, lovers of and caretakers to the Black community, exhibiting the trait of being in charge. A womanist is one who has developed survival strategies despite the oppression of her race and sex to save her family and her people. Primarily concerned with African American women's faith, survival, and freedom struggle.[23]

From a womanist perspective, the interconnectedness between the widows' struggles and the church's responsibility is the point where awareness and sensitivity intersect. Although there is no major body of work specifically addressing widows and the challenges they face, numerous parallels can be extrapolated. Womanists' basic issues are three-fold (race, gender, class); similarly, widows often experience layered losses (spouse, identity, income, social status). Womanist commitment to survival parallels that of widows navigating and surviving their new emotional and psychological norm. Other shared concerns between Womanist and widows include financial instability, expectation of strength, and community responsibility.

Rufus Burrow outlines six characteristics tantamount to the development of Womanist Theology: Theology, Liberation Global Theology, Theology, Prophetic

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[22] Emillie M. Townes, "Womanist Theology," in *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 1166–1167.

[23] Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner and Teresa Snorton, *Women Out of Order: Risking Change and Creating Care in a Multicultural World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 141.

Theology, and Theology. The first characteristic of Womanist Theology is a theology of survival. Black women in every era of America's history have been considered the chief protectors and defender of the Black family. As a rule, they understood they were expected to do whatever it took to protect themselves, their family, and the community. Womanist Theology gives special attention to Black women's day-to-day efforts to preserve Black life in a society that tends to devalue this life. Historically, Black women have found ways for themselves and their families to survive in the face of incredibly difficult conditions. Delores Williams emphasizes the theme of survival in her book *Sisters in the Wilderness*. She had the foresight to see that it is premature to talk about Black liberation until Black survivability is guaranteed.

Secondly, Womanist Theology, like Black Theology, is categorized as Liberation Theology. It is not identical with Black Theology, however, for it is not being forged primarily by Black men but by Black women. It is like Black Theology. Womanist Theology is both political and theological. Womanist Theology is concerned about power issues involved in relations between women and men and the dehumanizing ways these get played out at the expense of African American women, who suffer all forms of abuse, exploitation, and oppression. Thirdly, a Global Theology: Brown Douglas' essay states that Womanist Theology is global theology because it sees a basic communality of interconnectedness at the seat of reality.[24] Womanists maintain that anything that happens anywhere in the world affects directly or indirectly what happens everywhere. This means that the oppression of any group anywhere in the world affects other groups.

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[24] Rufus Burrow, "Development of Womanist Theology: Some Chief Characteristics," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 54, no. 1 (1999): 49.

Fourthly, a church theology developed from the specific experiences of African American women in religion and other areas. Throughout history and today, African American women have been the foundation of the Black church's strength. Womanist Theology supports women in all aspects of the church's mission and ministry. Women constitute most church members, actively serving in various roles. However, many denominations and modern churches still restrict them from holding leadership positions. Widows are also a significant part of women's church membership. Often unseen and unheard, they are overlooked and rarely receive pastoral care beyond a brief acknowledgment after their loss.

Looking through a womanist lens, this meets the criteria of male patriarchy and a form of oppression. In the book *Too Heavy A Yoke: Black Women and the Burden of Strength*, Chanequa Walker-Barnes writes:

> The modern church encourages African-American women to keep others' vineyards, while neglecting their own, in two ways, by venerating Black Women's performance of strength and depending upon women's labor and financial support to maintain the church, without providing equal opportunity for Black women to exercise their gifts in ministerial leadership; and by distorting Scripture in a way that encourages suffering and self-sacrifice among Black women.[25]

Strong Black Woman is a mask many Black women hide behind. Widows, particularly, hide their grief behind the mask of strength. They often feel pressured to remain strong and self-reliant, often bearing the burden of strength for others, children, family, and friends. Widows carry the weight of being strong, of continuing to work in ministry, of suffering, and of meeting others' needs while suppressing their pain. Widows

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[25] Chanequa Walker-Barnes, *Too Heavy a Yoke: Black Women and the Burden of Strength* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 133.

also find strength and heal more effectively in a supportive, safe community within the church where they can be vulnerable, unburden themselves, and share the commonalities of the hidden grief of widowhood.

Womanist pastoral care offers a way to remember and attend to what is meaningful in life.[26] Womanist pastoral care allows the individual or widow a place to be heard as an individual without feeling the need to package their story in the language of the caretaker. In the process of healing, people can tell their cultural stories of oppression and marginalization without shame. Womanist consciousness is thinking and acting simultaneously in two contexts: (1) the context of the oppressed Black communities' concerns and struggles, and (2) the context of women's struggle for liberation and well-being.[27]

The Womanist Theology's two contexts: concerns and struggles of the oppressed and the struggle for liberation and well-being for women, align closely with the care of widows found in the scriptures, and the doctrine of the communion of the saints. Womanist theology expresses the lived experiences of marginalized women and calls communities to faith to eradicate injustice and oppressive behaviors cloaked in spirituality. Chapter Two, Biblical Foundations, emphasized Isaiah Chapter One and illuminated the womanist themes of justice and communal responsibility. Communal responsibility is one of the key points of convergence between womanist theology, widowhood, and the communion of the saints. Stephanie Mitchem writes in Introducing Womanist Theology, "Black women have a history of finding strength in their communal

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[26] Stevenson-Moessner and Snorton, *Women Out of Order*, 141.

[27] Stevenson-Moessner and Snorton, *Women Out of Order*, 142.

religious lives."[28] Researchers also affirm communal responsibility and community support as important factors in strengthening a widow's resilience.[29] Communal responsibility and support from the perspective of pastoral care for widows are grounded in the Apostles' Creed, specifically the doctrine of the communion of the saints. Patterned after the early church, 'they had all things common' is the premise where womanist theology, widows' care, and communion of the saints' interconnect to provide a contemporary model for today.

The Communion of the Saints

The Apostle Creed comprises twelve articles that express the doctrine and beliefs of the Church:

> Article 1: I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth;
> Article 2: I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
> Article 3 Who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.
> Article 4: He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried.
> Article 5: He descended into hell. The third day he arose again from the dead.
> Article 6: He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
> Article 7: He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
> Article 8: I believe in the Holy Spirit
> Article 9: The holy Catholic Church, the Communion of the saints.
> Article 10: The forgiveness of sins.
> Article 11: The resurrection of the body
> Article 12: And in life everlasting[30]

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[28] Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology*, 54.

[29] Awaliah, Adenika, and Kaloeti, "Social Support as A Protective Factor for Widows' Resilience," 413.

[30] Publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2003), 6-12.

Each article in the Creed represents a fundamental tenet of faith and a core belief of Christianity. The phrase, the Communion of the Saints, is found in the ninth article, paragraph five of the Apostles' Creed, which reads, "The holy Catholic Church; the Communion of the Saints." The second portion of the statement, "The Communion of the Saints," affirms that the Church is the universal community of believers and not a building.[31]

The Catholic catechism states, "The term "communion of the saints'" therefore has two closely linked meanings: "communion in holy things (sancta)" and "among holy persons (santi)."[32] The article includes communion in spiritual goods, faith, sacraments, gifts, and charity, among others. The catechism further states, "None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together."[33] Implicit in this statement is the principle teaching of care, compassion, and sharing in one another's pains, grief, or joys.

The early church in Acts 2:44 and Acts 4:32 had all things in common and shared everything they had with one another. These scriptures are the foundation for the Communion of the Saints and the prism through which the care of widows in the New Testament will be examined.[34] Christians with possessions were charitable and shared with those in need. The communal nature of the Church and the Order of Widows are two

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[31] U.S. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Double Day, 2003), 269.

[32] U.S. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 269.

[33] U.S. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 269–70.

[34] Piotr Ashwin-Siejkowski, *The Apostles' Creed: The Apostles' Creed and Its Early Christian Context* (New York, NY: T and T Clark International, 2009), 2.

of the most significant factors that improved the plight of widows in the New Testament compared to the Old Testament.

Leadership sets the tone for any church, organization, or business, and the tone that is set early determines the culture. The leaders in the early Christian church adhered to and embraced godly precepts and led by example in their care for widows. Luke refers to widows more than the other Apostles (Luke 2:37; 4:25 & 26; 7:12; 18:3, 5; 20:47; 21:2 and 3). He also mentions widows three additional times in the book of Acts (6:1, 9:39, 9:1). Matthew mentions widow three times (1:6, 22:24, 22:25, 23:14) and Mark once (12:40). James 1:27 states, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for the orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world." James associates care for widows and the vulnerable in society with the truest form of religion and a reflection of one's relationship with God. Sharing, generosity, and compassion indicated being surrendered to God rather than worshipping money.[35]

The early church leaders understood the divine mandate to care for the widows and established a compassionate, charitable community of the saints through their conduct and teaching. Very early documents confirm that compassion and concern for the poor were fundamental teachings on what it meant to be a follower of Christ and a people of God.[36] Similar to James' emphatic admonition (1:27) and the "all things common" concept in the "communion of the saints," is one of the oldest surviving written catechisms from the late first century; the *Didache.* This document also emphasizes all

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[35] Rupen Das, "A Compassionate Community: What Did the Early Church Teach That Made Christians 'Lovers of the Poor'?," *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 17, no. 2 (2017): 40.

[36] Das, "A Compassionate Community," 39.

things in common, generosity, and charity, and it was likely distributed in Jesus' groups and the churches.[37] A few examples of parallel exerts from the Didache read:

> 1.5 Give to everyone who asks of you, and do not demand it back; for the Father wants something from his free gifts to be given to all. Blessed is he who gives according to the commandment, for he is guiltless;
>
> 4.8 You shall not turn away from him who is actually in need, but share with your brother in all things and not say things are your own, for if you are partners in what is imperishable, how much more so in perishable things?
>
> 15.4 And your prayers and almsgiving and all your deeds, do as you find it in the Gospel of our Lord.[38]

The widows in the early church had more diverse backgrounds than those in the Old Testament. They were not monolithic in social, legal status, or ethnic backgrounds. Widows from Greek, Hebrew, and Roman societies were all defined as socially and legally vulnerable, despite differences in their status from region to region.[39] Some widows also owned their own houses, as evidenced by the admonition not to devour their houses (Luke 20:47). As the number of widows increased, the definition and role of the widow in the New Testament evolved. To be a "widow" meant "a person without," and in the early church, this was usually designated as a woman whose husband had died and left her with no financial support.[40] The term "widow" also came to be used to refer to a particular class of Christian person.[41] The early church recognized God's preferential

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[37] Das, "A Compassionate Community," 37.

[38] Das, "A Compassionate Community," 37.

[39] Schollgen, "The Order of Widows in the Pastorals and in the Didascalia Apostolorum," 10.

[40] Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, *Women's Bible* Commentary, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 387.

[41] Stevan L. Davies, *The Revolt of the Widows: The Social World of the Apocryphal Acts* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), 70.

option for older women, instituting the innovative dual practices of the distribution to widows and the Order of Widows.[42]

The Order of Widows was a support community birthed in the early church. Bonnie Thurston, in *The Widows: A Women's Ministry in the Early Church*, states, "The order was the most prominent group of women in the first three centuries of the church."[43] The order has its biblical foundation in 1 Timothy 5:3-16, which first mentions a community of widows and the qualifications required to be a member:

> Honor widows who are really widows. If a widow has children or grandchildren, they should first learn their religious duty to their own family and make some repayments to their parents, for this is pleasing in God's sight.
>
> The real widow, left alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day, but the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. Give these commands as well, so that they may be above reproach. And whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially for family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.
>
> Let a widow be put on the list if she is not less than sixty years old and has been married only once, she must be well attested for her good works, as one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the saints' feet, helped the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way.
>
> But refuse to put younger widows on the list, for when their sensual desires alienate them from Christ, they want to marry, and so they incur condemnation for having violated their first pledge. Besides that, they learn to be idle gadding about from house to house, and they are not merely idle but gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not say.
>
> So, I would have younger widows marry, bear children, and manage their households, so as to give the adversary no occasion to revile us. For some have already turned away to follow Satan. If any unbelieving woman has relatives who are widows, let her assist them; let the church not be burdened, so that it can assist those who are real widows (1 Tim. 5:3-16).

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[42] M. Therese Lysaught, "Practicing the Order of Widows: A Call for an Old Vocation," *Christian Bioethics: Non-Ecumenical Studies in Medical Morality* 11, no. 1 (August 16, 2006): 52, https://doi.org/10.1080/13803600590926459.

[43] Bonnie Bowman Thurston, *The Widows: A Women's Ministry in the Early Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 7.

These scriptures reference an elect list of widows who were not on the list because they were needy, but because they committed themselves to the church and to carrying out specific duties. This is the only reference to this type of institution in the New Testament, and the criteria for belonging are what would be expected for an "Order."[44]

According to Stevan Davies, the early church embraced Judaism's concern for the protection of widows, and the widows quickly became an identifiable group with a shared lifestyle and shared concerns.[45] Catherine Kroeger, a scholar on women in ancient religion, asserts that there were ecclesial orders that included widows. Materials were also found titled "presbyteresses," indicating that widows were part of the ordained clergy.[46] This group of widows was given a place of honor. The widows were maintained by the gifts worshippers made to the bishops and were expected to pray for their sponsors as well as members of the church.[47] They were the first group of women ever to be honored in any way.[48] While there are conflicting views on the role of widows who served in an "order" and whether they were considered clergy, the existence of an Order of Widows is well established in the scripture and the literature. A comparison of the requirements and qualifications for those holding ecclesiastical leadership positions reveals their similarities. An analysis of the expected conduct outlined for widows in 1

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[44] A. E. Harvey, *A Companion to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 670, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511811371.020.

[45] Davies, *The Revolt of the Widows*, 70.

[46] Catherine Kroeger, "The Neglected History of Women in the Early Church," *Christian History Institute*, https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/women-in-the-early-church.

[47] Angelo Nicolaides, "A Critical Investigation into the Role of Widows in Early Church Life," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 103 (2022): 6, https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.1032.

[48] Davies, *The Revolt of the Widows*, 70.

Timothy 5:16, deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8-13, and Elders in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:1-9 is the same, and as are communal responsibilities.

With the emphasis on charity and benevolence, widows gravitated to the early Christian church in significant numbers, giving them access to clergy and positions of importance.[49] Not all widows were wealthy, fortunate enough to meet the qualifications to be enrolled in the Order of Widows (1 Tim. 5:9) or have a family member care for them (1 Tm. 5:8). The socioeconomic mix of most was either lower middle class, poor, or in extreme poverty, dependent on the benevolent acts of the church.[50] One group dependent on the church's resources was the Hellenist widows, who were neglected despite communal generosity and introduced the first conflict in the early church (Acts 6:1-7).[51] The Hellenist's complaint against the Hebrews raises issues of race and class as addressed in the Womanist Theology.

Conclusion

This Theological Foundations chapter focused on womanist and the communion of the saints, which provides a theological foundation for understanding believers' spiritual and natural connectivity. The recurrent theme that the communion of saints, womanist, Black Liberation, and Feminist Theology share is social justice, equality, and advocacy. Each theology highlights a swath of a marginalized community deemed

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[49] Jan Bremmer and Lourens Van Den Bosch, *Between Poverty and the Pyre: Moments in the History of Widowhood* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995), 50.

[50] Das, "A Compassionate Community," 39.

[51] Scott Spencer, "Neglected Widows in Acts 6:1-7," *The Catholic Biblical Association* 56, no. 4 (1994): 715.

inferior based on class, ethnicity, gender, or social status and seeks to engender change despite the reality of their lived experiences. Each theology endeavors to draw attention to an oppressive patriarchy and give voice to the inequalities against women, African American people, Black and brown women, and widows.

This project has a two-pronged objectives: the role of pastoral care (leadership) and a community of support for widows. The early church leaders followed Jesus's example of caring for widows, and an effective community of support for widows was established. Scott Spencer points out in his article, "Neglected Widows in Acts 6:1," that the apostolic leaders moved quickly to resolve the complaint raised by the Hellenist widows; however, he finds their response ambivalent and troubling.[52] He believes that there are traces of trivializing widows' concerns hidden in their two responses. The apostles' responses: Response One: "It would not be good for us to neglect the ministry of the word in order to wait tables" (Acts 6:2). Response Two: "We will turn this responsibility over to them and give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4-5). Spencer questions their subordination of "menial" tasks, such as feeding widows, to "spiritual" pursuits like teaching, preaching, and prayer. He also challenges the apostle's proclivity to promote teaching and preaching at the expense of serving food, in contrast to Jesus' pattern of blending the two vocations.[53] Since this project is aimed at increasing awareness, directed toward leadership, and at discovering the barriers that prevent adequate pastoral support and leader-led support for meeting the ongoing needs of widows, this was essential.

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[52] Spencer, "Neglected Widows in Acts 6:1-7," 729.

[53] Spencer, "Neglected Widows in Acts 6:1-7," 730.

This chapter examined theologies and the theologians who advanced liberation, feminist, and womanist perspectives, framing the communion of the saints as a theological basis for communal support. Chapter Five, Interdisciplinary Foundations, shifts the focus to the field of psychology and explores the psychological and sociological effects of Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD). This interdisciplinary chapter provides a holistic perspective that informs the effects and impact of PGD on widows.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The death of a spouse is commonly regarded as the most stressful and challenging life event. Widows experience a level of grief that requires not only spiritual interventions but may also require non-spiritual interventions during the bereavement process. For ministry leaders to become more sensitive to the ongoing needs of widows, it is incumbent upon them to understand grief not just from the biblical perspective of suffering but also from a psychological perspective. Psychology is defined as the "scientific study of behavior and mind" and emphasizes science and scientific methods.[1] Prolonged Grief Disorder falls within the purview of psychology, and its effects and implications on widows are the focus of this chapter.

The dominant focus of researchers in the last decade has been mainly on mental health, pathology, assessment of coping based on validated scales, and investigating criteria for PGD (Prolonged Grief Disorder).[2] Prolonged Grief Disorder has also been referred to in the literature as complicated grief and persistent complex bereavement

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[1] James S. Nairne and Dawn M. McBride, *Psychology* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2023), 5.

[2] Mai-Britt Guldin and Carlo Leget, "The Integrated Process Model of Loss and Grief - An Interprofessional Understanding," *Death Studies* 48, no. 7 (2024): 739, https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2023.2272960.

disorder.[3] It was not until March 2022, that PGD was officially recognized as a distinct mental health condition by The American Psychiatric Association and included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Text Revision 5 (DSM-5-TR).[4] Approved for listing under the category of Trauma and Other Related Disorders, PGD is estimated to affect 7% to 10% of people mourning the death of a loved one.[5]

The DSM-5 TR describes PGD as a maladaptive grief reaction that requires symptoms to persist at least twelve months after the death of a close loved one. The duration and severity of the symptoms are key factors that differentiate prolonged grief from normal grief. Additional symptoms include an intense yearning for and preoccupation with thoughts of the deceased, feeling as though a part of oneself has died, a sense of disbelief about the death, avoidance of reminders the person has died, intense emotional pains such as anger, bitterness, or sorrow, difficulty with reintegration into life, emotional numbness, feeling life is meaningless, and intense loneliness.[6] Serious medical conditions such as cardiac disease, hypertension, cancer, immune deficiency, and a reduced quality of life can accompany if PGD is untreated. The DSM-5TR also lists

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[3] Charles F. Reynolds, III et al., *Grief and Prolonged Grief Disorder* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2023), X.

[4] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Text Revision*, 322.

[5] Kristin L. Szuhany et al., "Prolonged Grief Disorder: Course, Diagnosis, Assessment, and Treatment.," *FOCUS, The Journal of Lifelong Learning In Psychiatry* 19, no. 2 (June 19, 2021): 161–72, https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.focus.20200052.

[6] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Text Revision*, 323.

significant impairments to social, occupational, cultural, and religious function that exceed cultural norms as symptoms of PGD.[7]

The Theoretical Framework and History of Prolonged Grief Disorder

Several foundational theories have impacted current thinking on grief and significantly influenced the formal designation of prolonged grief disorder in the DSM-5-TR. The first foundational grief theory can be traced back to psychoanalytical theories formulated by Sigmund Freud. He was the first to distinguish between normal and pathological grief in his seminal paper "Mourning and Melancholia."[8] Freud wrote, "The normal emotion of grief, and its expression in mourning, would throw some light on the nature of melancholia."[9] Freud introduced the term "grief work," describing it as a painful but normal process of detaching mentally from the "love object" and eventually reattaching to another. He viewed mourning and melancholia as two different responses to loss.

Mourning represented a healthy, adaptive process of detachment, and melancholia was a chronic, destructive reaction. Many of the criteria outlined in PGD are similar to the symptoms Freud described as melancholia, such as a sense of meaninglessness without the deceased, a sense of identity disturbance, and avoidance reminders, which he

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[7] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Text Revision*, 324.

[8] Holly G. Prigerson et al., "History and Status of Prolonged Grief Disorder as a Psychiatric Diagnosis," *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology* 17 (May 2021): 111, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-081219-093600.

[9] Prigerson et al., "History and Status of Prolonged Grief Disorder as a Psychiatric Diagnosis," 111.

described as the melancholic mourner's tendency to hallucinate, to name a few.[10] Freud's seminal writing, "Mourning and Melancholia," making the distinction between normal response to grief (mourning) and melancholia (depression) as pathological, remains pervasive in psychiatry.[11] Freud's primary interest was melancholia or depression, but his paper is regarded as the starting point of grief research and foundational to the evolution of PGD.

The DSM-5-TR distinguishes PGD and normal grief by intensity, duration, and symptoms. In its simplest terms, grief has been defined as an immediate, normal, and natural reaction to loss.[12] Normal or acute grief is described as the initial, intense reaction to loss,[13] accompanied by shock, disbelief, and other intense emotions that tend to diminish over time.[14] The seminal work of Erick Lindemann in 1944 introduced the term "acute grief" and is credited with originating the concept of bodily reactions to grief. [15] Lindemann wrote regarding the symptoms of early grief:

> The picture shown by persons in acute grief is remarkably uniform. Common to all is the following syndrome: sensations of somatic distress occurring in waves from twenty minutes to an hour at a time, a feeling of tightness in the throat, choking with shortness of breath, need for sighing, an empty feeling in the

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[10] Prigerson et al., "History and Status of Prolonged Grief Disorder as a Psychiatric Diagnosis," 111.

[11] Prigerson et al., "History and Status of Prolonged Grief Disorder as a Psychiatric Diagnosis," 113.

[12] John W. James and Russell Friedman, *The Grief Recovery Handbook, 20th Anniversary Edition* (New York, NY: Collins Harper, 2009), 3.

[13] Heather L. Servaty-Seib and Helen Stanton Chapple, *Handbook of Thanatology* (New York, NY: Association for Death Education and Counseling, 2021), 236.

[14] Kristin L. Szuhany et al., "Prolonged Grief Disorder: Course, Diagnosis, Assessment, and Treatment.," *FOCUS, The Journal of Lifelong Learning in Psychiatry* 19, no. 2 (June 19, 2021): 163, https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.focus.20200052.

[15] Erich Lindemann, "Symptomatology and Management of Acute Grief," *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 101, no. 2 (n.d.): 2, https://psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/ajp.101.2.141.

> abdomen, lack of muscular power, and intense subjective distress described as tension or mental pain.[16]

Lindemann's pioneering work made a significant contribution toward normalizing grief and typical symptoms, paving the way for the American Psychological Association to define grief as the anguish experienced after a significant loss, usually the death of a beloved person.[17]

The last noteworthy theory of grief to significantly influence PGD is John Bowlby's attachment theory (1963). Bowlby was one of the most influential psychological theories of grief based on his observations of children's reactions to parental separation. He observed anxiety proceeds through three integrated phases: (1) protest marked by acute distress (crying) to gain mother's return; (2) despair, marked by a hopeless, withdrawn preoccupation with the absent mother (mourning); and (3) detachment, marked by denial of the need for the absent mother and openness to the environment (acceptance).[18] Bowlby's foundational work was the first to advance the notion that loss involves stages of grief.[19] Elisabeth Kubler-Ross is credited with the proliferation of stage theory that introduced five stages of grieving: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance in her book, "On Death and Dying." She described each stage separately, strongly suggesting they were distinct and sequential.[20]

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[16] Lindemann, "Symptomatology and Management of Acute Grief," 2.

[17] Gary Vandenbos, *APA Dictionary of Psychology* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2015), 470.

[18] Reynolds, III et al., *Grief and Prolonged Grief Disorder*, 84.

[19] Prigerson et al., "History and Status of Prolonged Grief Disorder," 115.

[20] Margaret Stroebe, Henk Schut, and Kathrin Boerner, "Cautioning Health-Care Professionals: Bereaved Persons are Misguided Through the Sages of Grief," *OMEGA-Journal on Death and Dying* 74 no. 4 (2017): 457.

Bowlby's 1980 presentation of stages was more discriminating than Kubler-Ross's. He stated: "These phases are not clear cut, and any one individual may oscillate for a time back and forth between any two of them."[21]

Treatment and Assessment --Prolonged Grief Disorder Scale (PG-13 Revised)

The treatment and assessment for PGD rest solely with trained mental health professionals. Of the numerous evidence-based treatments for PGD identified in the literature, support groups are the only treatment identified that can be adapted and used in a non-clinical setting. Limited systemic research has been conducted on the efficacy of support groups on grief-related symptoms relative to prolonged grief. Studies have, however, shown that peer-to-peer support groups are effective adjunct alternatives to traditional treatment approaches for serious mental illness and addictions.[22] Peer groups involve people with similar backgrounds who provide emotional, social, or practical support to each other, and it has been defined as "a system of giving and receiving help founded on key principles of respect, shared responsibility, and mutual agreement of what is helpful."[23]

> A key underlying assumption of the peer support approach is that due to shared experiences and life circumstances, peers are better able to establish connections of trust and support with those in need (Castellano, 2012). Peer support services may aim, for example, to promote hope, recovery from illness or trauma, improved life skills, psychological well-being, and social integration (Landers &

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[21] Margaret Stroebe, Henk Schut, and Kathrin Boerner, "Cautioning Health-Care Professionals: Bereaved Persons are Misguided Through the Sages of Grief," *OMEGA-Journal on Death and Dying* 74 no. 4 (2017): 458.

[22] Paul T. Bartone, Jocelyn V. Bartone, John M. Violanti, and Zaneta M. Gileno, "Peer Support Services for Bereaved Survivors: A Systematic Review: *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying* 80, no. 1 (2019): 138.

[23] Bartone, Bartone, Violanti, and Gileno, "Peer Support Services for Bereaved Survivors," 138.

> Zhou, 2011). Regardless of the specific program, peer supports draw on their shared experiences to provide empathetic understanding, information, and advice to those they are helping."[24]

Support groups provide the social interactions widows need to counter the isolation and loneliness that accompany widowhood. It has been stated, "Widow is a social condition that requires attention and support."[25] The type of support widows need varies depending upon the widows, their unique circumstances, and where they are in the bereavement process. The immediate need may be more practical assistance, help with funeral arrangements, paperwork, meals, and household chores, which can relieve the emotionally overwhelmed and challenged widow. Over time, an emotional support system is crucial, takes on many forms, and is linked to creating a safe space for widows to share their feelings and express their grief.

Social interaction with other widows is one of the most critical elements of a widow's social network and support system. Support for the widow is emotional, in the form of care and affection, and practical, in the form of more tangible items such as money and job assistance. The people in the widow's social network provide this support. Social support is one of the interpersonal predictors of mental health and can be helpful in the recovery of widows suffering from the loss of their husbands. A social support is described as the lack of social support increases the risk of adverse mental health outcomes.

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[24] Bartone, Bartone, Violanti, and Gileno, "Peer Support Services for Bereaved Survivors," 138.

[25] Awaliah, Adenika, and Kaloeti, "Social Support as A Protective Factor for Widows' Resilience," 421.

The lack of social support is a risk factor for developing PGD, and support groups can provide a valuable source of social support.[26] There is a tendency for many to gravitate to support groups instead of therapy, and the helpfulness of support groups may vary depending on the bereavement group. Studies have shown that bereaved persons seek support from family and friends more than from professionals. When social support is perceived as helpful, it is a strong determinant of psychosocial well-being and a protective factor against PGD and depression post-bereavement.[27] Regarding my project, understanding the need for widows to have a community of support is a core objective.

Several self-reporting assessment tools are available for use by trained mental health professionals. Like support groups, the PG 13-R questionnaire is a self-reporting screening tool that can be adapted and used to initiate a conversation in a non-clinical setting. This dual-purpose scale is used to diagnose PGD according to the diagnostic criteria. The PG-13-R has been used in several studies examining grief-related feelings, thoughts, and actions over the past month. The survey begins with three gatekeeper items to determine whether the respondent had lost a significant other (Q1), how long ago the death occurred (Q2), and the impairment associated with the above symptoms.[28]

Yearning or preoccupation with thoughts and memories of the deceased is the gateway symptom that queries separation distress. The subsequent questions query the

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[26] Kristin L. Szuhany et al., "Prolonged Grief Disorder: Course, Diagnosis, Assessment, and Treatment.," *FOCUS, The Journal of Lifelong Learning in Psychiatry* 19, no. 2 (June 19, 2021): 167, https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.focus.20200052.

[27] Jane Marie Chami and Julie Ann Pooley, "Widowed Young: The Role of Stressors and Protective Factors for Resilience in Coping with Spousal Loss," *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying* 88, no. 2 (2003): 483, https://doi.org/10.1177/00302228211047088.

[28] Holly G. Prigerson, Paul A. Boelen, Jiehui Xu, Kirsten V. Smith, and Paul K. Maciejewski, "Validation of the New DSM-5-TR Criteria for Prolonged Grief Disorder and the PG-13-Revised (PG-13-R) Scale," *World Psychiatry* 20, no. 1 (January 12, 2021): 98, https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20823.

other symptoms: identity disruption, disbelief, avoidance, intense emotional pain, difficulty with reintegration, emotional numbness, feeling that life is meaningless, and intense loneliness. These items (questions Q3 through Q12 in the PG-13-R) were rated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "one = not at all" to "five = overwhelmingly" as shown below.[29]

Figure 1: Example of Screening for Prolonged Grief Disorder (PG-13-Revised)

Q1. Have you lost someone significant to you?	⊙ YES	○ NO
Q2. How many months has it been since your significant other died?	18 Months	

For each item below, please indicate how you currently feel.

Since the death or as result of the death	Not at all	Slightly	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Overwhelmingly
Q3. Do you feel yourself longing or yearning for the person who died?	○	○	⊙	○	○
Q4. Do you have trouble doing the things you normally do because you are thinking so much about the person who died?	○	○	⊙	○	○
Q5. Do you feel confused about your role in life or feel like you don't know who you are any more (i.e., feeling like a part of you has died)?	○	○	⊙	○	○
Q6. Do you have trouble believing that the person who died is really gone?	○	○	⊙	○	○
Q7. Do you avoid reminders that the person who died is really gone?	○	○	⊙	○	○
Q8. Do you feel emotional pain, sorrow, or pangs of grief about the death?	○	○	⊙	○	○
Q9. Do you feel that you have trouble re-engaging in life (e.g., problems engaging with friends, pursuing interests, planning for the future)?	○	○	⊙	○	○
Q10. Do you feel emotionally numb or detached from others?	○	○	⊙	○	○
Q11. Do you feel like life is meaningless without the person who died?	○	○	⊙	○	○
Q12. Do you feel alone or lonely without the deceased?	○	○	⊙	○	○

Q13. Have the symptoms above caused significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning?		⊙ YES	○ NO
Your summed score is:	30	INTERPRET	

Source: Holly G. Prigerson, Ph.D., et al., *JAMA Psychiatry*, February 2, 2022.

Figure 1. Example of Screening for Prolonged Grief Disorder (PG-13-Revised)

Three independent community-based samples showed that the PG-13-R is a reliable tool for assessing grief symptoms on a dimensional scale. A PG-13-R symptom score of thirty or greater identifies syndromal-level PGD symptomatology. The dimensional PG-13-R symptom score, the diagnosis of PGD using the PG-13-R threshold symptom score of thirty plus the impairment criterion, and the diagnosis of PGD using the new DSM-5-TR

[29] Charles F. Reynolds III, Holly G. Prigerson, and M. Katherine Shear. "Special Report: Prolonged Grief Disorder—What You Need to Know," *Psychiatric News PN* 58, no. 12 (December 2023): https://doi:Doka, Kenneth J. and Martin, Terry L., *Grieving Beyond Gender: Understanding Diverse Grieving Styles*, Third (New York, NY: Routedge, 2025), 144.

criteria all predict enduring distress and dysfunction. The PG-13-R and the new DSM-5-TR criteria for PGD appear to be reliable and valid measures for the classification of bereaved individuals with maladaptive grief responses.[30]

Prolonged Grief Disorder and Biblical Foundations

Widows in the Bible were members of the most oppressed, marginalized, and vulnerable group named in scripture. The death of their husband had a far-reaching effect on their social, economic, and psychological condition. Prolonged grief disorder provides a vehicle to explore the psychological repercussions of the grieving widow beyond the well-documented socioeconomic issues. The psychology of PGD integrates with my biblical foundation's pericope (Isa. 1:17) and accentuates the life of Naomi found in the book of Ruth. Naomi is the personification of a widow who, in our contemporary times, embodies the reasons PGD was approved and added to the DSM-5-TR-13. The account of Naomi's plight is in Ruth 1:1-5 in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) reads:

> In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.[31]

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[30] Prigerson, Boelen, Xu, Smith, and Maciejewski, "Validation of the New DSM-5-TR Criteria," 98.

[31] Coogan, et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, 398.

Three wives become widows in this pericope. Naomi lost her husband, Elimelech, Ruth, and Orpah lost their husbands, Mahlon and Chilion; however, neither experienced the depth of grief that Naomi experienced (Ruth 1:13). Naomi is an example of a widow who suffered the devastating effects of compounded tragedies, complex circumstances, and profound grief. Her entire nuclear family, husband, and two sons died during a time when she was solely dependent on them for her provision. If psychologists and psychiatrists were to overlay this biblical narrative with the research behind PGD, they would recognize that any one of these factors: dependency on the deceased, the death of a husband or child, unexpected deaths, and economic distress would make Naomi extremely high risk for PGD.[32]

Naomi expressed the intense emotional pain she felt (Ruth 1:20) when she lamented about her losses and changed her name from Naomi (pleasant)[33] to Mara (bitter).[34] Her sentiments mirror the diagnostic criteria that denote anger, bitterness, and sorrow related to the death of her husband and two sons. Her desire to withdraw and separate from her daughters-in-law (Ruth 1:8) and their loud weeping (Ruth 1:9) could be correlated with symptoms of withdrawal or avoidance of reminders of the loss of her husband and sons. Naomi's expression of once being full and now being empty correlates most with the symptom of identity interruption.

The secondary losses to be considered that contributed to Naomi's grief began when her husband uprooted their family and moved to a foreign land. Those losses

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[32] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Text Revision*, 325.

[33] Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook*, 585.

[34] Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook*, 528.

include the familiar, friends, and other family relationships. The loss of social status, financial deprivation, and the shame of returning home destitute without her husband and sons further compounded her grief. At first glance, Naomi's decision to return home to Bethlehem might be misconstrued as a sign of readiness to move on or a sign of healing in terms of PGD. Amidst the uncertainty about what awaited her and having been personally confronted with a similar situation, leads me to believe her decision to move hinged more on whether she wanted to go through her bereavement process surrounded by friends or in a foreign land where she had no support.

Fortunately, healing, hope, and restoration are also a part of Naomi's story, and one key indicator of healing in PGD is social integration. The healing process began for Naomi the day she returned, and the city's people came to see her (Ruth 1:19). Their actions, in a sense, provided an adapted version of PGD's "group therapy" treatment in the form of community support. That social support was not a one-time occurrence but was ongoing (Ruth 4:14, 17). The story of Naomi is a representation of the mental anguish women in the Bible experienced, in whole or in part, when they became widows. Losing a husband or son whom they were dependent upon for their provision was depressing and debilitating. Examining Naomi's life considering PGD provides insight into how incorporating science with faith may have possibly mitigated some of the psychological effects of widowhood for women in the Old Testament.

The experience of widows in the first-century New Testament church differed vastly from those in the Old Testament, mainly because the leaders were more committed to adhering to God's divine mandate to care for and support the widows. As a result of the leader's actions, the teaching of Jesus on faith and suffering, the practice of having all

things in common as a way of life, and the newly formed order of widows, the need for PGD would be minimal compared to that of widows in the Old Testament. The section on prolonged grief disorder and theological foundations will detail the differences.

Prolonged Grief Disorder and Theological Foundations

The Theological Foundations Chapter examined the communion of the saints in the first-century New Testament church and the womanist theology. The Apostle's Creed references the Catholic (universal) Church and the communion of the saints. The communion of the saints is the church where they had everything in common. Christians with possessions were charitable and shared with those in need. Several connections can be made between this early church, their care for widows, and prolonged grief disorder. From the standpoint of PGD, the lack of social status and social support interferes with the process of adapting to loss.[35] The early churches' communal nature and the order of widows are two of the most significant contributing factors to the widow's spiritual, mental, and emotional health. Having those social support systems established in the church, other symptoms of PGD were alleviated, such as difficulty reintegrating into life, engaging with others, and feeling intense loneliness. Surrounded by people who shared common experiences provided a safe space for grieving widows. In addition to the emotional needs, ongoing practical needs were also provided, reducing the economic distress and heightening the risk for PGD.

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[35] Kristin L. Szuhany et al., "Prolonged Grief Disorder: Course, Diagnosis, Assessment, and Treatment.," *FOCUS, The Journal of Lifelong Learning in Psychiatry* 19, no. 2 (June 19, 2021): 161, https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.focus.20200052.

The order of widows gave the early church widows a sense of purpose, identity, meaning, and belonging. This required widows to fast, pray, and visit the sick, and, in so doing, to meet their own spiritual needs as well as those of others. Research affirms that individuals who can find meaning show better psychological adjustment following bereavement.[36] The leaders in the early church took a holistic approach to addressing the needs of widows, thereby reducing the risk factors that led to widows falling prey in the Old Testament. Prolonged grief disorder was reduced because the New Testament church addressed the ongoing spiritual, emotional, and practical needs of the widows. This model can be adapted and become effective in today's contemporary times.

Womanist theology and PGD converge in historical grief and inequities, and in their shared goal of improving human conditions in their respective disciplines, which will benefit widows. "The Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities" affirms that African Americans are twice as likely to have lost two or more close family members by the age of thirty, lose a parent by age twenty, and a spouse by age sixty, than their White counterparts. These losses may put African Americans at a higher risk for PGD, but relatively little research has been conducted on their bereavement experiences.[37] The limited studies that exist have indicated that African Americans' experience of grief and mourning may differ from those typical of mainstream North American culture, and

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[36] Kim M. Christian, Samar M. Aoun, and Lauren J. Breen, "How Religious and Spiritual Beliefs Explain Prolonged Grief Disorder Symptoms," *Death Studies* 43, no. 5 (2019): 320, https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2018.1469054.

[37] Jasmine Jamison-Petr and Joah L. Williams, "Understanding Black and African American Grief Following Inclusion of Prolonged Grief Disorder in the DSM-5-TR," *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health* 11, no. 5 (July 17, 2023): 22, https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-023-01727-x.

accounting for those cultural differences is an important research goal. Rosenblatt and Wallace (2013) noted:

> There are so few works focused on African Americans that it seems to us that African American grief has been neglected to a remarkable extent. And the neglect is compounded in that, judging by what is reported in the Social Science Citation Index, the little that has been written is rarely cited in the wider grief literature. (p. xi)[38]

Matters of diversity and social injustice are compelling issues that challenge womanist theology and psychology. Research consistently evidenced higher rates of PGD among the marginalized, and studies suggest African Americans experience higher levels of PGD compared to Whites.[39] One of the risk factors that heightens the risk for PGD symptoms is dependency on the person who died. A spouse is named explicitly compared to other kinship relationships.[40] This makes widows in low socioeconomic communities more prone to developing PGD. Focusing on a few critical elements of intensity, duration, and the criteria of PGD, a few parallels can be drawn.

"Thanatology is not the only discipline hampered by a lack of diversity and a centering of majority experiences. Related disciplines such as psychology, psychiatry, nursing, medicine, bioethics, palliative care, and hospices share its white and majority dominance."[41] White privilege and majority perspectives permeate the research. Yet, African Americans are impacted by death at a younger age, and extended family, this

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[38] Leeat Granek and Tal Peleg-Sagy, "The Use of Pathological Grief Outcomes in Bereavement Studies on African Americans," *Transcultural Psychiatry* 54, no. 3 (2017): 388, https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461517708121.

[39] Servaty-Seib and Chapple, *Handbook of Thanatology*, 451.

[40] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Text Revision*, 325.

[41] Servaty-Seib and Chapple, *Handbook of Thanatology*, 8.

work is removed from the marginalized are minimally included. Racial and ethnic differences in mental problems have been a problem from the beginning of grief research and grief work. Lindemann's research on grief, for example, was based on a sample of primarily young White women survivors of sudden and traumatic loss.[42] From a womanist perspective, more research with PGD needs to be conducted that includes class, race, and gender. Culturally sensitive psychological research is not only unjust to a large population but it is also poor science.[43]

Prolonged Grief Disorder and Historical Foundations

Joanna, the princess of Austria, was the sixteenth-century widow discussed in Chapter Three, Historical Foundations. Looking at Joanna's life through a historical and psychological lens, one could conclude she exhibited several grief-related behaviors consistent with PGD. Eighteen days before the birth of her son, unbeknownst to Joanna, her husband of less than two years died. Devastated upon learning of his death, Joanna experienced immense emotional pain, and she retreated from social life. Further complicating matters, within a short period, her only son was permanently taken from her. The sudden and traumatic death of Joanna's husband, the loss of a child, and childhood adversity (Joanna lost her mother at age four), each represent a high-risk group.

Joanna's behavior was then identified as melancholia; today, her behavior aligns with the diagnostic criteria for PGD. Joanna's major depression early in grief, the unusual

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[42] Servaty-Seib and Chapple, *Handbook of Thanatology*, 237.

[43] Granek and Peleg-Sagy, "The Use of Pathological Grief Outcomes," 393.

circumstances surrounding the death of her husband, and the loss of a child are all documented factors known to heighten the risk for PGD.[44] Joanna manifested many of the symptoms associated with PGD, for example, her persistent preoccupation with the deceased that extended beyond the requisite one-year period. Her excessive yearning and longing for the deceased, intense emotional pain, profound sorrow, crying for long hours, refusal to eat, physical illness, and difficulty re-engaging. Most notable was her vow to wear black for the remainder of her life.

Family history is another key risk factor and predictor of PGD development, and based on Princess Joanna's family history, she seemed predisposed to develop PGD. She was a third-generation widow and the third generation with some degree of mental illness that was triggered by multiple losses and the death of her spouse. The most extreme case of mental illness was Joanna's grandmother, queen of Castile, named Joanna the Mad. She, too, endured the trauma of multiple deaths, losing her two siblings, an infant nephew, and her mother. Losing a child elevates the risk of PGD, and she began showing signs of mental instability (melancholia) and inability to carry out her duties. It was the sudden death of her husband, another factor that increased the risk of developing PGD. History records she remained with the embalmed coffin of her husband for eight months, refusing to separate and delaying his burial.[45] Queen Joanna's history of depression, post-traumatic stress, and separation anxiety were factors that increased her risk of developing

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[44] Reynolds, III et al., *Grief and Prolonged Grief Disorder*, 54.

[45] Heidi Saavedra Pérez, "The Loss When Losing a Loved One: Epidemiological Studies of Prolonged Grief Disorder" (Rotterdam, NED: Erasmus University, 2019), 11, https://pure.eur.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/46445137/Heidi-Saavedra_thesis_vo.pdf.

PGD and contributed to the extravagant way she grieved. She spent the last forty-nine years of her life isolated, tormented, and unable to care for herself.

The life of Princess Joanna could serve as a model of someone who was diagnosed with PGD and treated successfully. Peering through a PGD lens, withdrawal from society mirrored grief avoidance; she resorted to faith to find relief from emotional pain; she joined the Jesuits in search of meaning in her suffering and social support. Studies have shown that the ability to find meaning in death can lead to better psychological adjustment, and the inability to find meaning is linked to the development of prolonged grief. They have also shown that those who engaged in spiritual activities more strongly correlated with fewer grief symptoms and less depression.[46] Joanna's unwavering faith, disciplined life of prayer, and dedication to the poor, oppressed, and widows were the pathway to her overcoming the effects of prolonged grief disorder.

Conclusion

Many of the factors that make someone highly susceptible to developing prolonged grief disorder exist in churches and communities. Losing someone with whom you have had a close relationship can also be especially hard if the bereaved person has had a problematic upbringing or if there are unusually stressful consequences after the death, such as inadequate social support, conflicts with family, or significant financial problems. Traumatic circumstances of the death, such as suicide or gun violence, can make someone a candidate for PGD. Economic distress because of the death, such as not

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[46] Christian, Aoun, and Breen, "How Religious and Spiritual Beliefs Explain Prolonged Grief," 317.

having insurance or the primary provider dying, leaves the widow, who is already in despair, even more predisposed to the effects of PGD. These risk factors are more prominent, and these situations are more prevalent in lower-income and economically distressed communities.

Understanding PGD sheds light on the fact that a widow's grief is largely never single-fold. She encounters multiple losses when her husband dies, which compound and intensify her grief. It is no wonder that the most straightforward task becomes complex when a widow is challenged with identity, attachment, shame, and low self-esteem issues.[47] The ripple effect of concurrent stresses and other secondary losses presents additional challenges that increase the stress level and affect the widow's coping process.[48] Multiple losses within a short period can lead to a prolonged state of mourning, bereavement overload, and PGD.[49] Before the pain and suffering of the first death can be processed, subsequent ones occur, and there is no time to grieve or mourn the first loss.

Relegating grief to the death of a loved one alone ignores the impact of the ongoing secondary losses widows continue to experience. According to the *Handbook of Thanatology*, "grief is a type of stress reaction–a set of highly personal and subjective responses individuals experience in connection with real, perceived, or anticipated losses."[50] This expanded definition of grief encompasses material, physical, mental, and

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[47] Thomas Dellman, "Are Shame and Self-Esteem Risk Factors in Prolonged Grief After Death of a Spouse," *Death Studies* 42, no. 6 (2018): 379, https://doi.org/https:doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2017.1351501.

[48] Servaty-Seib and Chapple, *Handbook of Thanatology*, 246.

[49] Mary Tobin, Sharon Lambert, and John McCarthy, "Grief, Tragic Death, and Multiple Loss in the Lives of Irish Traveller Community Health Workers," *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying* 81, no. 1 (May 1, 2020): 130–154, https://doi.org/10.1177/0030222818762969.

[50] Servaty-Seib and Chapple, *Handbook of Thanatology*, 235.

other peripheral losses. Guldin and Leget, in their research on the integrated process model of loss and grief[51] affirm that over a person's lifetime, many different types of losses are experienced: a job, pet, relationship, ambitions, status, etc., and they suggest an interprofessional approach, much like healthcare, would be beneficial.[52]

Grief work and pastoral care must be reframed to regard a more comprehensive approach to the universality of one experiencing other variations of loss.[53] Prolonged grief disorder aligns well with the project, and it sheds light on the reasons why the bereavement process can linger. It also reinforced the importance of understanding the ongoing needs of widows and the benefits of having a community of support. A more comprehensive approach to the project is shaped by insights gleaned from examining the holistic model of widows' care modeled by the early church fathers.

This interdisciplinary chapter provided a psychological perspective that informed the effects and impact of PGD on widows. The final chapter, Chapter Six, presents the project's construct, analysis, and results. It also scrutinizes the hypothesis using qualitative and quantitative data.

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[51] Guldin and Leget, "The Integrated Process Model of Loss and Grief," 738.

[52] Guldin and Leget, "The Integrated Process Model of Loss and Grief," 747.

[53] Guldin and Leget, "The Integrated Process Model of Loss and Grief," 739.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

Despite the emphatic and undeniable mandate to care for widows expressed throughout the scriptures, widows have generally remained a neglected entity in our churches and communities. Widows are often overlooked, their needs are virtually unknown, and consequently unaddressed. The problem identified at Kingdom Come Ministries (KCM) is a lack of awareness of the ongoing needs of widows. The general nature of the project was to raise the leadership's sensitivity and awareness of widows, their unique challenges, and ongoing needs.

Thus, the hypothesis is that if ministry leadership participates in a workshop about what it means to be a widow, then they will become more sensitive (aware) to the needs of those members who are widows. The intent is to educate leaders with knowledge of the biblical, historical, theological, and psychological understanding of widows, so that they will become more cognizant of their role in providing compassionate, effective pastoral care. The desired outcome is that ultimately, the leaders will move forward with developing a formal support system for widows as they embrace Widowhood: The Role of Pastoral Care in Establishing a Community of Support.

This project aimed to educate the leaders and move them to action on behalf of widows. As the investigator, I served as the lead facilitator for the six socio-educational

sessions on what it means to be a widow. Two workshops were conducted, each consisting of three two-hour sessions. The workshop format was carefully selected to maximize the learning experience for church leaders. The workshops provided a safe environment conducive to promoting engaging and interactive learning. The six two-hour sessions, specifically designed to accommodate various learning styles, were effective in fostering face-to-face interactions and providing the leaders with opportunities to give immediate feedback.

Additionally, the workshop format afforded leaders the opportunity to self-reflect and journal in real-time as the content was presented. The workshops were conducted in the ministry context, at Kingdom Come Ministries, as an extension of the Empowerment Center. The optimal number of participants desired was eight to ten, and initially, ten leaders expressed interest in enrolling in the project. The commitment to both workshop sessions, barring unforeseen circumstances, was reiterated, and two participants reluctantly withdrew from the project before the workshop's start date. After the workshops began, two participants were unable to complete both sessions due to schedule changes. Their data was segregated, and their comments were synthesized with the qualitative responses. None of their quantitative responses were included in the results to prevent the data from being skewed in any direction.

The six participants who completed both workshops were Elders, Deacons, and ministry team leaders. All participants were African American, the majority were female, and four were over the age of fifty. None of the participants were a part of any vulnerable groups (minor, pregnant, cognitively or mentally impaired, or currently incarcerated). The implementation team, comprised of the context and professional associates, and a

licensed clinical mental health counselor, was involved during the planning, design, and development phases of the project. Their specific roles and contributions are outlined later in this chapter. As a token of appreciation, each participant, context associate, and license counselor received a gift card in a bag inscribed with an inspirational scripture phrase, such as: Trust in the Lord with all your heart, Let your light shine, and Let all that you do be done in love.

This project was undertaken to bring the ongoing needs of widows to the forefront and to emphasize the role of church leadership in supporting them. The leaders of KCM learned about the needs, challenges, and experiences of widows, gaining greater awareness and sensitivity to their needs. They knew widowhood was an unwelcome experience that a person enters upon the loss of a spouse, and they discovered it is highly regarded as one of the most stressful life events a person will ever experience. KCM leaders were taught how the death of a husband or wife immediately and fundamentally impacts the life of the surviving spouse.

My personal lived experience as a widow, shared in the Ministry Focus chapter, is the impetus for this doctoral project. My journey as a widow began less than six years after taking my wedding vows. The reality of "until death do us part" thrust me into a myriad of emotions unfamiliar to me, even though I had lost a parent, a brother, grandparents, and other close loved ones. For the first time, I became aware that losing a spouse differed from other losses and warranted examination. The pain of my lived experiences is interwoven in the research foundation chapters. Bereavement overload and multiple losses from the pain I experienced losing my husband and both of his parents within months of each other is a common theme found throughout the project. My desire

to establish a community of support for widows was born out of the isolation and loneliness I experienced, and the inability to share with anyone, I felt understood. Lastly, my eight-year cycle of profound sadness and intense grief sparked my interest in researching prolonged grief disorder. The bereavement process of widows and the lack of awareness, sensitivity, and support systems to address their ongoing needs set me on a course that led to this doctoral work.

Methodology

The project's implementation was realized through two six-hour workshops held on Saturday, July 19, 2025, and August 9, 2025. After consulting with my mentors and my professional and content associates, the workshops' content was grounded in the four foundational chapters. The biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary chapters, when combined, present a holistic approach to raising leaders' awareness and sensitivity to what it means to be a widow and meeting their ongoing needs. Each workshop included prayer, scripture, quotes, journaling, and group discussions.

Qualitative research methods from four different sources were employed to assess the project's effectiveness and to test the hypothesis. The hypothesis that leaders' awareness (sensitivity) to widows' needs would increase was measured through pre- and post-questionnaires (Appendix A and B), group discussion questions (Appendix C), observations during the sessions, and journal entries. The pre-post-questionnaire was administered during the first workshop, and the same questions were asked at the conclusion of the last session. The pre-questionnaire collected baseline data on

participants' basic knowledge, empathy, sensitivity, and the role of leadership regarding widows. It also collected data on their biblical knowledge, the leadership's role, and their personal beliefs about widows. The questions were specifically designed to assess leadership's awareness of widows' needs and measure the effectiveness of the workshops.

The questionnaire was built on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Each question or statement included a comment section to allow for additional feedback or explanation regarding their response. Responses to the pre- and post-survey questions were analyzed to obtain quantitative and qualitative data. Reflective journaling was encouraged after each session and between the two workshops. Participants were asked to document their initial thoughts, insights, perspectives, or feelings. Data collected from the group discussion questions and observations provided qualitative data. The overall effectiveness of the two workshops was measured by data extracted from the course evaluations (Appendix D) distributed at the end of the training.

Recruitment Process

Recruitment for the project commenced six weeks prior to the first workshop on Saturday, July 19, 2025. A promotional announcement letter (Appendix E) inviting the leaders to attend was presented at Kingdom Come Ministries' Sunday, June 8, 2025, Leadership meeting. The leadership meeting was attended by Elders, Deacons, Ministry team leads, and others currently serving in a leadership capacity. The announcement letter outlined the purpose of the research, the criteria for participation, the dates and times of the workshops, contact information, and registration details. To bring clarity and

appeal to leaders who were not widows or widowers, the workshop title was changed from “Widowhood: The Role of Pastoral Care in Establishing a Community of Support” to “Widows and the Church: Cultivating Compassionate Leadership.” A new flyer was created and distributed (Appendix F). The title change removed the academic phrasing and shifted the focus from pastoral care to emphasize the responsibility of all ministry leaders, not just the pastor. Recruitment continued throughout the month, and the last request to participate in the project was made during the July 13, 2025, leadership meeting.

Pre-screening phone interviews were conducted from June 19 to June 25 to reconfirm interest, acquire additional contact information, and verify that the prerequisite criteria were met. The reasons interviewees gave for interest in the project vary from a desire to learn more about widows because they observed their mother’s experiences when they became a widow, or they have friends who are widows. Other interviewees expressed interest in learning more about loss and grief due to the loss of a close loved one.

All interested participants submitted a completed Informed Consent Form (ICF) (Appendix G) prior to attending the first workshop. The informed consent form was reviewed in detail to assess participants’ comprehension of the importance of key aspects, including volunteerism, confidentiality, and anonymity. The telephone interviews ensured that none of the participants belonged to a vulnerable or excluded group, and that any outstanding questions were addressed. Each interview lasted approximately 15 minutes, and all interviewees felt the workshop would be helpful.

After the telephone interviews were completed, I signed and dated the informed consent form of those participants who met the criteria and qualified for participation in the project. To reinforce that each participant fully understood the project's scope, their rights, and responsibilities, they received a signed copy of the informed consent form before the workshop began. Communications with participants were maintained via email and text messages to keep them engaged, thank them for their time, and remind them of the session dates and times. Below is a portion of an email that was sent after the first workshop: This week, I've meditated on Isaiah 1:1-17, and I encourage you to sit with that text and allow the Lord to speak to your heart. As we dialogued about the impact of grief, loss, and widowhood, I am reminded of Galatians 6:2, which implores us to "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ." Before our upcoming workshop next Saturday, August 9, please take some time to meditate on these scriptures and write in your journal, "What is God inviting you to do differently as a result of the first workshop? Other journal entries, you may want to consider: "How has your thinking changed about widows' care?" How has your perspective changed towards the vulnerable and the marginalized?

Workshop Preparation Phase

During the pre-workshop planning stage, several face-to-face meetings were held with context associates to discuss all aspects of the program design from start to finish. The context associates were possible participants and were provided with a copy of my Spiritual Autobiography and a high-level outline of the content. This was done to prevent their responses from being premeditated should they become participants in the project.

Meeting discussions included room setup, the workshop agenda, refreshments, their role, and responsibilities before, during, and after the workshop. Responsible for administrative tasks, the input and support of the context associates were essential to ensuring the workshop's seamless implementation. Participants' packets were prepared in advance, envelopes labeled "Confidential" contained a folder, a note card with a unique identifier, a notebook for journaling, pre- and post-questionnaires, a course evaluation, and an ink pen.

The professional associates possessed depth of knowledge in counseling, psychology, psychiatry, leadership, and pastoral care. Their prayers, expertise, and counsel were sought before I began my doctoral journey and continued to guide me throughout. The professional associates received documents to review, provided feedback, offered advice, and recommended resources. Each received a copy of the approved Candidacy Review Packet (CRP) and provided support at various points during the project's design and development. In addition to meetings with the context and professional associates, a separate on-site walkthrough was conducted with an individual knowledgeable about audio-visual technology. The equipment was tested in advance, and seating arrangements and sightlines were reviewed to avoid any unexpected issues. As the sole facilitator, I focused on delivering the content, confident that participants had an unobstructed view of the material.

Content Development

The workshops' content was based on my Ministry Focus chapter and the four foundational chapters of my project. The Ministry Focus chapter introduced the project's

origins and its significance to me, the Church, and the community. The unique needs and challenges of widows, along with the focus on widows rather than widowers, comprise the core of the introductory content. The ongoing needs of widows and the current gap between the biblical mandate and the church lay the groundwork for discussions on the effects of multiple losses, grief, and bereavement overload that accompany the loss of a husband. These topics were further explored in the foundational chapters on biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary topics.

The content of the Biblical Foundation session of the project focused on God's concern for the fate of widows. The emphasis was on God's divine mandate to protect and care for widows, and the consequences suffered for neglecting this marginalized population. Isaiah 1:17, "Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow," provided the five specific directives germane to the project.

The content for the session on Historical Foundation was derived from the life of a sixteenth-century historical figure, Princess Joanna of Austria. Joanna's story provided a historical example for the framework of a contemporary widows' ministry. Joanna's experiences with multiple losses in quick succession are used as a precursor to an experiential activity designed to illustrate the effects of bereavement overload. Her response to widowhood and her transformation of her pain into advocacy are highlighted. Joanna's sources of spiritual and social support are also key elements examined.

The content for the Theological Foundation examined the tenets of Womanist Theology and the communion of the saints in relation to pastoral care for widows. The communal nature of the early church and the Order of Widows provided the blueprint for

forming an effective community of support. The lesson materials demonstrated how widows found purpose and felt a sense of belonging among women with whom they shared life experiences.

The course content for the Interdisciplinary Foundation session investigated the field of psychology, specifically Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD), its effects, and implications for widows. Mental health, pathology, and the validated scales used to solidify the criteria for PGD were included. This curriculum was developed to demonstrate how the early churches' communal nature and the order of widows met the practical, spiritual, mental, and psychological needs of widows.

Implementation

Workshop Part One – Saturday, July 19, 2025 - Session One

The first of the two-part workshops commenced promptly at 9:00 a.m., with me introducing myself, welcoming the attendees, and expressing my gratitude to them for their participation in the study. Pastor Jonathan H. Robinson, the Senior Pastor of Kingdom Come Ministries, was present to provide opening remarks and convey his full support for the project. Lauding the project's significance and potential impact, he encouraged participants to engage fully. The musical selection played before the workshop prompted him to lead us in a brief period of worship, after which he offered the opening prayer. The professional, licensed clinical mental health counselor present at the session, in case the content presented an adverse emotional reaction from a participant, was introduced. An overview of the workshop, including the agenda, ground rules, and

objectives, was covered to ensure participants understood the workshop's structure, the importance of confidentiality, and the desired outcome (Appendix H). The August 9, 2025, workshop agenda followed a similar format. While covering the ground rules, I reemphasized the importance of maintaining privacy and confidentiality. A PowerPoint presentation was used throughout the workshops to provide a visual aid, enhance comprehension, and improve retention.

The workshop's goal was to equip leadership with knowledge of widows from a biblical, historical, theological, and psychological perspective. I provided an overview of both workshops and the entire research project. I focused broadly on the content of the four foundational chapters, then narrowed it to the three sessions to be trained. Session One was "Introduction to Widowhood," and Session Two, "God's Heart and Care for Widows," was based on the biblical foundation chapter. Session Three, "Transforming Loss into Faith and Advocacy," was based on the Historical Foundations chapter.

Achieving the stated workshop objectives was crucial to meeting the goal. A few of the stated objectives of the workshop were: Participants will become more aware/sensitive to members who are widows. Participants will develop an understanding of what it means to be a widow. Participants will learn the unique challenges of widows. Participants will learn Biblical directives that undergird the care for widows. Time was allotted for participants to ask questions or comment on the direction, focus, and objectives of the workshop. Each participant selected the confidential envelope of their choice. I reiterated the importance of anonymity before requesting the participants open the envelope, write their assigned unique number on all its contents, and complete the

pre-assessment questionnaire. Completing the pre-assessment questionnaire took longer than the allotted fifteen minutes, and additional time was permitted.

Upon concluding the preliminary logistical activities, the actual training in this session began with me briefly sharing my personal experience with widowhood. I shared how the loss of my husband, coupled with the multiple deaths that followed shortly thereafter, changed me. It led me to become a Grief Recovery Counselor and ultimately led me to this doctoral project. After explaining the problem statement, the session began with widowhood and the rationale for emphasizing widows rather than widowers. After defining widowhood, widows, and widowers, the remainder of the session was focused on the crux of the training, "Why Widows?"

I cited statistical data from the United States (U.S.) census that supported the project's focus on widows. The training on "Why Widows?" helped the leaders grasp how the loss of a spouse affects the man (a widower) and the woman (a widow) dramatically differently. They came to realize that widowhood and the bereavement process disproportionally affect a widow emotionally, socially, economically, and psychologically. A widow's loss is multi-layered, and her grief is compounded by concerns for her personal welfare and often the welfare of her children. The widow's needs are not merely complicated based on gender, but race and class are other relevant factors that exacerbate the bereavement process.

The needs and challenges of widows were covered extensively, and the participants found that portion of the training informative. The participants expressed gratitude when I taught the section on "Why NOT Widowers." The social and economic differences were highlighted, along with biblical reasons for the project's focus on

widows rather than widowers. All the participants found the biblical reasons, such as widows' care is mandated and dominates scripture, and there are no detailed narratives of concerns for widowers in scripture. The participants were surprised to learn that Abraham mourning Sarah, and Jacob mourning Rachel, are the only mentions of a widower's grief.

The training concluded with this anonymous quote: "You lose a parent; you lose your past. You lose a child; you lose your future. You lose your spouse, you lose yourself." Although the training was focused on widows who lost a spouse, the anonymous quote at its conclusion elicited an emotional response from all participants. All the participants had lost one or both parents, three had lost a child, and two had lost their spouse. Participants were prompted to write a journal entry about their initial thoughts, insights, perspectives, and feelings about widowhood based on the training. Those who felt comfortable were asked to share a new insight or perspective they learned about widows. One participant stated that they always thought widow and widower were the same and used the terms interchangeably. Another stated they were unaware of the impact gender played on widowhood. A few said they had never really thought about the challenges of widows.

Session Two

The second session, God's Heart Concerning Widows, provided a bastion of support for the care of widows rooted in scripture and anchored in Isaiah 1:17. The session began with a "Name That Widow" activity that helped participants transition back into learning mode and prepare for the biblical foundation training. I described a few widows in the Bible, and the participants shouted out their names. Bathsheba, the

answer to the question, “Who was the mother of Solomon and Uriah’s wife, was the only response that generated a discussion. None of the participants had thought of her as being a widow. Following the review of the objectives, several scriptures were introduced in support of God’s mandate to care for widows. I introduced the biblical foundational text that I chose, Isaiah 1:17, and began an expository teaching.

The participants were not familiar with the scripture, and understanding the passage was crucial. I provided background and a high-level synopsis of the verses that led up to my chosen text. I shared that the audience was specifically the leaders and laity. God was repulsed by their dereliction of care for the marginalized. He compared the leadership to the rulers and laity in Sodom and Gomorrah, and he was weary of their worship and religious acts. Lastly, I focused on the remedy found in the five directives in my foundational verse, Isaiah 1:17.

All the participants were captivated and profoundly impacted by hearing this teaching for the first time. Participants volunteered to read the passages of scripture in different versions to gain even greater clarity. The participants felt the weight of the responsibility and personally reflected on their role. The effect on the participants was unmistakable; their body language signaled amazement and disbelief, warranting an immediate pause for reactions and responses.

The discussion was organic and ensued longer than expected. They were fixated on how emphatic the directives to leaders were regarding widows. The discussion also centered on the many religious activities associated with ministry and service today and on how none include care for widows. The session ended by connecting Isaiah 1:17 with

the portion of scripture in James 1:27 that defines pure, undefiled religion as caring for orphans and widows in their distress.

Essential to the success of this project was leadership's grasp and acceptance of God's desire and their role as it relates to widows. The biblical foundation session was the linchpin that linked the subsequent sessions. The two main objectives for this session were achieved: Participants learned the biblical directives that undergird God's care for widows, and they learned the biblical foundation that reinforces church leaders' responsibility to widows. The following discussion questions were discussed at the close of this session: What new insights or perspectives did you learn about God and widows? What does "Plead the case of the widow" mean today? How does Isaiah 1:17 define justice, and why is it important today? Throughout your ministry experience here or elsewhere, what has been your experience interacting with widows?

Session Three

The session on Transforming Loss Through Faith and Advocacy began with definitions of grief, types of grief, loss, and types of losses. The focus of this session was to raise the participants' sensitivity to widows experiencing secondary losses, understand and recognize signs of bereavement overload, and the importance of spiritual and social support during bereavement. Princess Joanna of Austria, a historical figure, was introduced as an exemplar. I taught on the effect of multiple losses and how grief is unique to each individual. The participants learned about Joanna's transformation, her connection to the Jesuits, and the importance of church and compassionate leadership. Joanna benefited from a community of support, and she eventually established a convent

to provide such a community for widows. The discussion reinforced the reality of multi-layered losses and the traumatic effects of multiple losses to the group.

The discussion on grief and the Loss History experiential activity elicited emotional responses from all participants. During the debrief of the activity, multiple participants shared their personal experiences with loss. Tears were visible, and voices trembled as participants reflected on their own periods of grief and various losses back-to-back. The discussion included the insensitivity of religious clichés and the hurt felt when others impose a timeline on their grief. The licensed therapist present offered valuable insights on grief from a professional counselor's perspective. To refocus the conversation back on widows, I asked the question, What impact do you think multiple losses have on a widow's ability to grieve and heal? The last discussion question I asked the participants about was the roles that faith and the church play in the widows' healing process. Other discussion questions were: How do you think experiencing multiple losses affects a widow's bereavement process overall? What role should faith and the church have in the life of widows and their healing process?

Workshop Part Two – Saturday, August 9, 2025 - Session Four

The second workshop began with prayer, followed by an overview of the objectives and a reminder of the importance of confidentiality. The recap of the previous workshop was presented as a heart-shaped word cloud, and participants were asked to select a word and what resonated with them. Central to this teaching was the compassionate and charitable support leadership provided for widows. The key takeaways from this training were the communal nature of the early church, the

importance of creating a safe space for widows to process grief, and the need for church leadership to establish support systems for widows. The teaching began with the participants reading the twelve articles of the Apostles' Creed below. I explained the correlation between the phrase in the ninth article, "the communion of the saints," with the portion of scripture in Acts 2:44, "they had all things common."

Table 3. Nine Articles of the Apostles' Creed

	THE APOSTLES CREED
Article 1	I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth
Article 2	I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord
Article 3	Who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary
Article 4	He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried.
Article 5	He descended into hell. The third day, he arose again from the dead.
Article 6	He ascended into haven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
Article 7	He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
Article 8	I believe in the Holy Spirit
Article 9	The holy Catholic Church, ***the communion of the saints***
Article 10	The forgiveness of sins.
Article 11	The resurrection of the body
Article 12	And in life everlasting

Building on the "all things common" premise, I contrasted the treatment shown to widows in the Old Testament, who were often destitute and neglected, with that of widows depicted in the early New Testament church. Participants learned that the early

church recognized God's preferential treatment of widows and that widows became their own distinct and identifiable class of Christians. First Timothy 5:3-16 was taught, highlighting women who were considered widows indeed and the responsibility the scripture placed on the widow's immediate family to care for them. Participants were introduced to the Order of Widows, the most prominent ecclesial order of women in the first three centuries.

The duties of these widows included house visits, fasting, praying for the sick, and instructing younger women. To lend credence to the status accorded to these widows in the early church, I presented a side-by-side comparison of the criteria used for elders and deacons. Some of the requirements and qualifications demonstrate the similarities between the Order of Widows and those of deacons and elders.

Table 4. Ecclesiastical Comparison: Widows, Deacons, Elders

Order of Widows I Timothy 5:16	**Deacons I Timothy 3:8-13**	**Elders I Timothy3:1-7 and Titus 1:1-9**
Wife of one husband	Husband of one wife	Husband of one wife
Known for good works	Honest, not double-tongued	Above reproach
Shown hospitality	Not specified	Hospitable
Washed saints' feet, help afflicted	Proven by service and tested first	Cares for God's church, teaches
Devoted to good works	Holds faith in pure conscience	Holds to sound doctrine
Proven over time	Must be tested first	Not a recent convert
Charitable by nature	Not a lover of money	Not a lover of money

This order of widows provided meaning and purpose, social interactions countered isolation, loneliness, and created a safe place to share feelings and express their grief. The

New Testament leaders established a community of support that not only provided care for the widows but also gave them a sense of purpose. I used the actions taken by the Apostles when the widows were neglected in Acts 6:1 to demonstrate the early church's approach to Pastoral care. I posed the question to the participants about how today's contemporary church could adapt the principles of the early church and learn from this model to prompt discussion. Other discussion questions included: The early church shared everything in common; how can church leadership today adopt this principle to support widows? What kinds of involvement or support have you witnessed with widows in the church here or elsewhere? How does cultural or societal views shape the treatment of widows?

Part Two – Session Five

In the session on Integration of Psychology and Theological Truths, I discussed Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD), its criteria, symptoms, and treatments. The session began with defining PGD and the key theories that led to its evolution and its official recognition as a diagnosis in 2022. I explained the difference between normal, acute, and prolonged grief. The four key criteria: death of a close loved one, at least one year since death, intense longing, and the presence of three of eight symptoms, qualify for PGD. The eight symptoms, the high-risk factors, and treatments were also discussed in detail. Participants were informed that professional clinicians can diagnose and treat PGD. A copy of a popular self-reporting assessment tool below was distributed and reviewed to provide a point of reference for the types of questions asked. Participants noted how closely the criteria and symptoms align. The assessment tool is displayed in Table 5.

Table 5. Prolonged Grief Disorder Assessment Tool

Prolonged Grief Disorder (PG-13-Revised)

Q1. Have you lost someone significant to you? Yes___ / No ___

Q2. How many months has it been since your significant other died? ___ Months

For each item below, please indicate how you currently feel?

Since the death, or as a result of the death…

		Not at all (0)	Slightly (1)	Somewhat (2)	Quite a bit (3)	Over-whelmingly (4)
Q3	Do you feel yourself longing for the person who died?					
Q4	Do you have trouble doing things you'd usually do because you are thinking so much about the person who died?					
Q5	Do you feel confused about your role in life or feel like you don't know who you are anymore?					
Q6	Do you have trouble believing the person who died is truly gone?					
Q7	Do you avoid reminders that the person who died is truly gone?					
Q8	Do you feel emotional pain related to the death?					
Q9	Do you feel that you have trouble re-engaging in life?					
Q10	Do you feel emotionally numb or detached from others?					
Q11	Do you feel that life is meaningless without the person who died?					

Q12	Do you feel alone or lonely without the person who died?					
Q13. Have the symptoms above caused significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning? Yes___ / No ___ tool[1]						

One of the clinical treatments for PGD, support groups, was discussed in depth as a model for a widow's support group. Participants were familiar with peer-to-peer support groups and mentioned trust, connection, understanding, and emotional support as benefits they could offer widows. The session ended with a discussion of the three types of support widows need after their spouse dies: immediate and practical, emotional support, and social support. The discussion questions were: What are some of the fears and challenges do you believe widows might face that would keep them from participating in a support group? What does a community of support look like to you, and how would it benefit a grieving widow?

Part Two – Session Six

The final session continued the teaching on PGD from a biblical perspective. I identified Naomi in the book of Ruth as an exemplar and asked the participants to examine her life through the lens of PGD criteria, risk factors, and symptoms. Based on the knowledge obtained in session five, the participants identified the primary and numerous secondary losses that would have made Naomi a classic, high-risk case for PGD.

[1] Holly G. Prigerson, et al., "Validation of the New DSM-5-TR Criteria for Prolonged Grief Disorder and the PG-13-Revised (PG-13-R) Scale," *World Psychiatry* 20, no. 1 (2021): 98, https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20823.

Table 6. PGD Criteria, Risks, and Symptoms

Criteria	High Risk Factors	Symptoms
Death of someone close	Loss of spouse or child	Intense emotional pains, bitterness, sorrow
Over 12 months	Dependency on the deceased	Intense loneliness
Intense longing	Sudden, unexpected loss	Disbelief about the death
Preoccupation with thought or memories	Multiple losses	Emotional numbness
	Financial stress after the death	Identity disruption
	History of trauma and anxiety	Feeling life is meaningless
	Female Gender	Difficulty integrating with relationships and activities

Beyond mentioning Naomi losing her husband and two sons, the loss of relationship with her daughter-in-law, Orpah, financial support, loss of identity, social status, friends, and the loss of the familiar are secondary losses.

In the second part of this teaching, I shared that Naomi's life also exemplifies a community of support providing hope, healing, and restoration. Naomi's first encounter with this support is found in Ruth 1:19, when the city was stirred and moved upon her return. The women provided ongoing support to Naomi in Ruth 4:14 and 17. Naomi found purpose, meaning, and a fulfilled life. The teaching ended with a discussion about establishing a community of support, and participants considered what it might look like. After everyone had completed the post-questionnaire and the course evaluation, I restated the problem statement and shared my hypothesis with the participants. The workshop concluded with participants expressing a desire to remain involved in any future endeavors. They requested information from the presentation and offered to participate in

any brainstorming session to establish a community of support for widows at the church. The final discussion question was: How have the workshops influenced your understanding of widowhood and the role of pastoral care?

Summary of Learnings

This Summary of Learnings section outlines the compilation of quantitative and qualitative results derived from pre- and post-questionnaires, reflective journaling, discussions, and observations. Each of these methods helped evaluate and substantiate the hypothesis. The qualitative data gathered from the journaling, discussions, and observations further corroborated the hypothesis and are highlighted later in this section. The research methods examined participants' knowledge, sensitivity, and general understanding of widows, as well as the effectiveness of the workshops. After the workshop, the participants' average pre-post score increased from 45.5 to 47.8, indicating a +2.3 points or 5.1% improvement in awareness and sensitivity towards widows. The results validated the hypothesis that leaders who attend a workshop on what it means to be a widow will have increased awareness (sensitivity) towards members who are widows.

Pre- and Post-Questionnaire Results

The pre- and post-questionnaires comprised eleven statements that provided the objective quantitative data. The ratings were on a five-point Likert scale, and each rating was assigned a numeric point value to quantify the responses. The point values were

assigned as follows: Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Not sure (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1) as shown below.

Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Not Sure (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)

The questionnaire also included one open-ended question, one knowledge-based question, and one demographic question. A single demographic question was asked to protect anonymity, given the small sample size. Responses from each of the six participants who attended all six sessions were collected and tabulated for all eleven questions. This figure shows the combined pre- and post-scores for all questionnaire results.

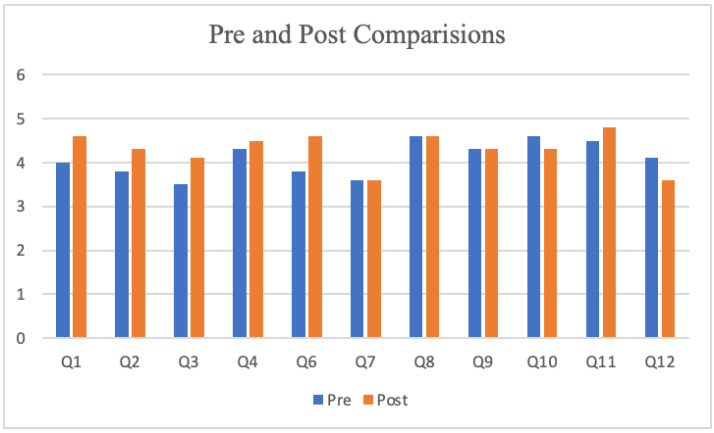

Figure 2. Overall Results of Pre- and Post- Questionnaires

The overall results of the quantitative pre-post data show improvement in six of the eleven questions. The ratings vary from significant positive trends across most questions (Q1- Q4, Q6, Q11), no change in questions (Q7-Q9), and a slight decline in questions (Q10, Q12). Each of these questions included a comment section where participants communicated their thoughts, beliefs, or opinions. The comments provided a deeper insight into the rationale behind their responses and qualitative data that helped interpret the results more accurately. The pre-post comparison chart provides a visual of

the overall results of the pre-post survey questionnaire. A closer examination of each question and a summary of participants' pre- and post-comments reveal trends and a comprehensive view of the results.

Pre- and Post-Results by Question

Q1. I am aware of the specific challenges that widows face.

The figure illustrates the comparison of pre- and post-workshop scores measuring participants' awareness of widow struggles.

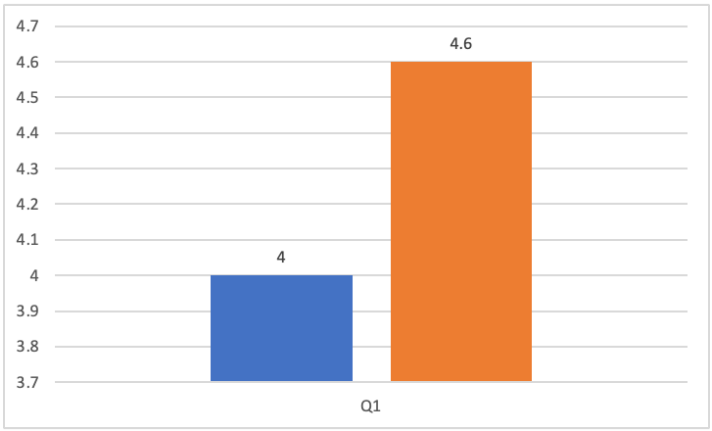

Figure 3. Awareness of Widows' Struggles

The result shows a +6-point change in the pre-post scores or a 15% increase in participants' understanding of widows' challenges. Four of six participants responded strongly agree at the end of the workshop, compared to only two initially. The comments before the workshop show a general awareness of widows' challenges based on observations or personal experience. Participants' greater awareness of the social, emotional, financial, and other aspects of widowhood led to a better understanding of what it means to be a widow. All participants expressed an increased compassion and sensitivity, demonstrating an enhanced awareness of the intricacies of widowhood.

Q2. I am comfortable discussing topics related to grief and loss with widows.

This figure depicts participants' confidence level in interacting with widows before and after the workshops. The +0.5 change in scores reflects a 13% increase in participants' confidence in engaging in conversation with widows about loss and grief. Five of six participants agreed or strongly agreed post-training, compared with three of six before training.

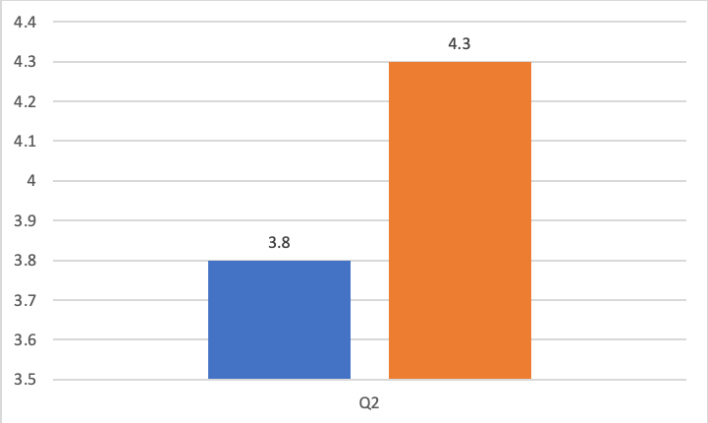

Figure 4. Comfort Discussing Grief and Loss

Except for participants who were widows, participants' confidence in engaging in conversation with widows about grief was low. One participant wrote pre-training, "I would not know where to begin," and post-training wrote, "With this training, it gives me confidence in how to approach the topic."

Q3. I have a good understanding of what it means to be a widow.

This figure shows a +.67 change in post scores and a notable 17% increase in measuring participants' understanding of widowhood and directly supports the hypothesis.

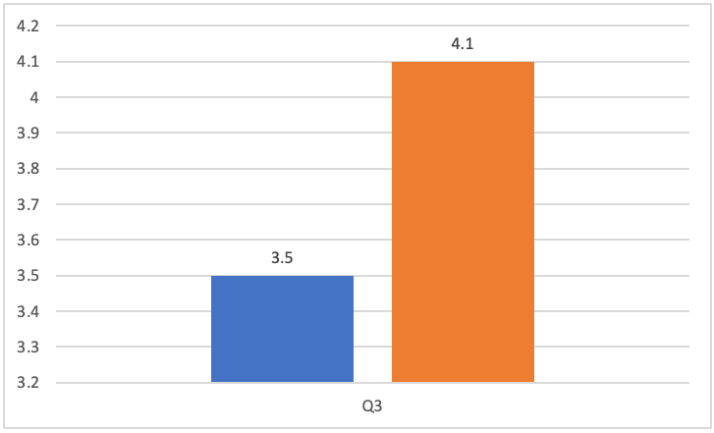

Figure 5. Understanding Widowhood

This statement sets the conditions for the project's success, and the 17% increase is noteworthy. This increase represents a substantial change in participants' understanding, awareness, and sensitivity to widows. The results measure the impact and relevance of this research project. The results support the hypothesis that education on what it means to be a widow is effective and a key component to addressing the lack of awareness of widows' ongoing needs. The data reinforces that the lack of knowledge is one of the primary reasons widows are overlooked and neglected in our churches. The pre- and post-scores, along with the qualitative data, suggest that the leaders found the workshop transformative. Two participants who disagreed and strongly disagreed showed an upward trend. One participant commented that they did not know where to begin, and at the conclusion of the training, acknowledged that learning what it means to be a widow brought them clarity.

The fourth question, 'I know what the Bible teaches on the special treatment of widows evaluated the participants' biblical knowledge. Figure Six presents a modest 5% increase, which is attributed to a solid baseline established in the pre-survey scores. The results based solely on numeric data, without accompanying qualitative data, could be

misleading. All participants generally understood, to varying degrees, that the Bible instructed the church to care for widows.

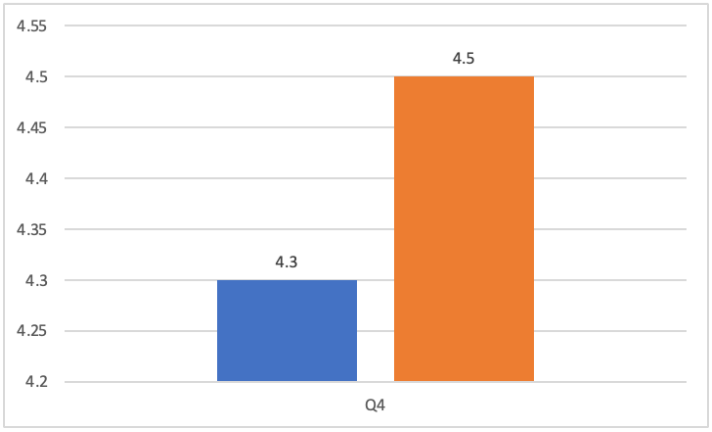

Figure 6. Knowledge of Biblical Teaching on Widows

Post-surveys show strong evidence of deeper biblical knowledge and understanding of God's mandate to care for widows. Four of the six participants specifically cited Isaiah 1:17, the foundational scripture for this project, after the workshops. They also cited James 1:27 and Galatians 6:2. A few participants found the scriptural foundation the most impactful and the primary factor in raising their sensitivity and awareness.

The participants' responses to the question (Q5) 'What comes to mind when you hear the word widow?' were centered on loss, isolation, and grief before the workshop. After the workshops, participants' responses broadened and included the multi-layered emotional, social, and psychological experiences of widows. Participants' self-awareness, bias, and stereotypes were gauged in Q6. People have misconceptions and stereotypes about widows. The 21% improvement in Figure 7 is the largest of all pre-post results.

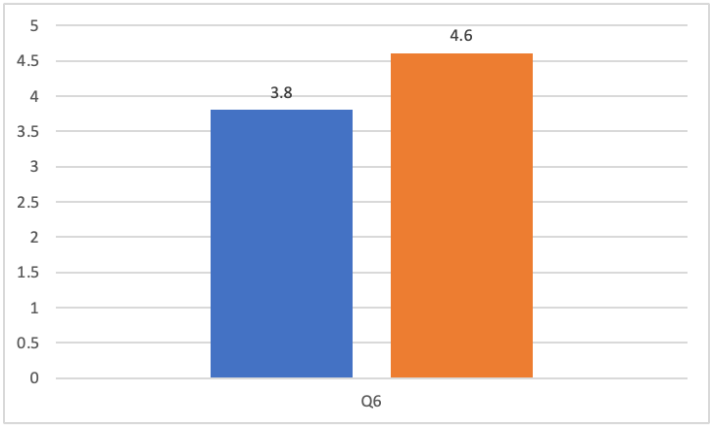

Figure 7. Awareness of Misconceptions about Widows

The 21% increase demonstrates that participants had greater recognition of the stereotypes and misconceptions widows face from society. After the workshop, two of the six participants who had no awareness of the cultural and societal biases towards widows shifted their responses from "not sure" to "strongly agree." The increased knowledge and understanding of the stigmas, unrealistic expectations, and isolation that widows encounter led to greater awareness and sensitivity.

Examining the next three results in figures 8, 9, and 10 (Q7, Q8, Q9) indicates no change. Actual participant scores and the qualitative data reveal a different narrative. There are nuances in each that merit closer examination and a more in-depth analysis than just viewing the overall numerical results. The pre-post scores below show mixed views on the impact of gender in widowhood.

P1 Pre/Post	P2 Pre/Post	P3 Pre/Post	P4 Pre/Post	P5 Pre/Post	P6 Pre/Post
4/4	4/3	3/5	2/1	4/4	5/5

Most of the participants remained confident in their initial belief about the difference in the bereavement process for widows and widowers. One participant became more convinced after the workshops, changing their response from "not sure" to "strongly

agree, and one increased in their belief that there was no difference. Most noted gender differences that place widows at a disadvantage socially, financially, and emotionally.

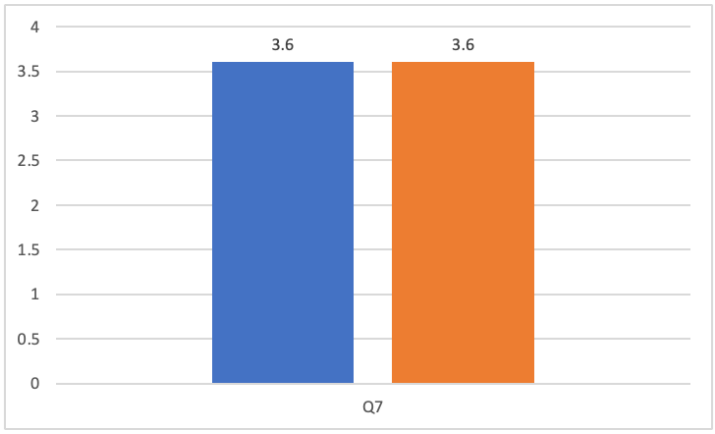

Figure 8. Impact on Widowhood: Widows and Widowers

The second question with no numeric change (Q8) assesses church leadership's role in meeting widows' needs. The 4.6 shows that the pre-scores were high and remained steady after the workshops. Participants articulated that the church's support is a biblical mandate and spiritual responsibility. The slight (unnoticeable) improvement seen in post-scores is attributed to one participant who moved from "not sure" to "agree." Most of the leaders (four of six) referenced the Bible in their comments and generally agreed that church leaders had a role in meeting the needs of widows.

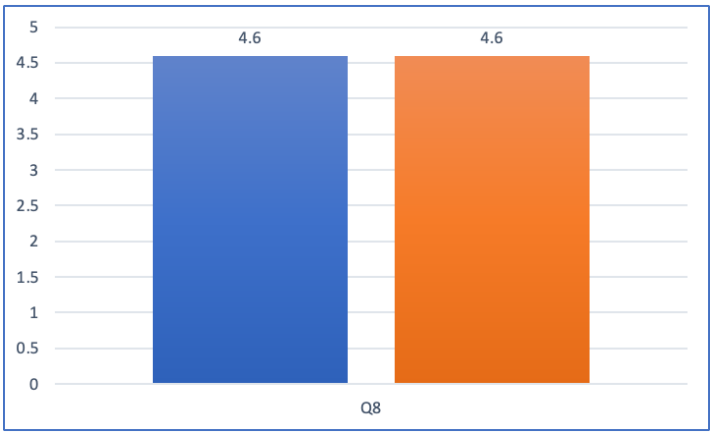

Figure 9. The Church Leadership's Role in Caring for Widows

The qualitative data indicate convictions were more strongly held and firmly rooted in participants' expanded knowledge of scripture after the workshop. The foundation scripture, Isaiah 1:17, was mentioned in several post-question comments along with compassion, care, and empathy. These results support the leaders' awareness of widows, their understanding of their connection to pastoral care, and the influence of the teaching.

The third question (Q9) assesses participants' empathy, compassion, and sensitivity to widows' needs in the congregation. It directly addresses the hypothesis that leaders will become more sensitive after attending a workshop on what it means to be a widow. The numeric values before the training (4.3) were positive; only one participant was unsure. The qualitative data reveal the impact of the workshop and growth in sensitivity. Participants (P3, P4, P6) acknowledged that the training taught them how to be more sensitive and increased their understanding of the widows' ongoing needs.

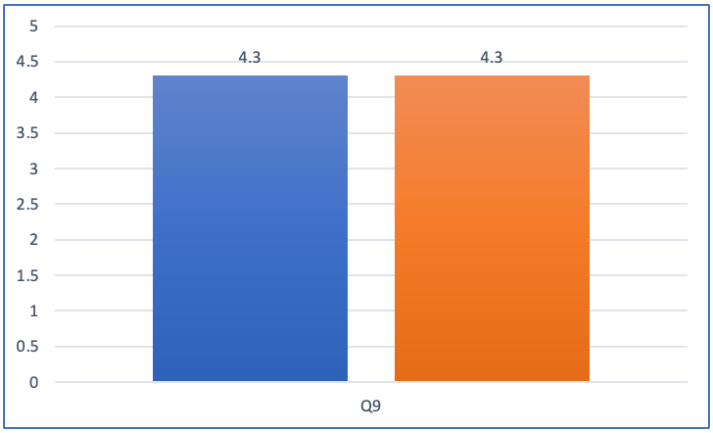

Figure 10. Sensitivity to Widows' Needs

The results of Q10 show a slight decrease (-7%) in participants' awareness of widows' unique needs compared to losses of other close relationships. Participants comprehended the magnitude of the loss of a husband. Before the workshop, most strongly agreed (four of six). Two participants commented on the financial impact on widows, and two categorized their loss as difficult, as shown below. After the workshop,

participants focused on loss of identity, self-worth, and support. Two participants referenced the portion of an anonymous quote discussed during the workshop, “When you lose your spouse, you lose yourself. The slight decrease in the score indicates less agreement that a widow’s bereavement process differs from other losses. It also suggests that a widow’s loss is more nuanced than initially thought; it is not an indication of loss of knowledge.

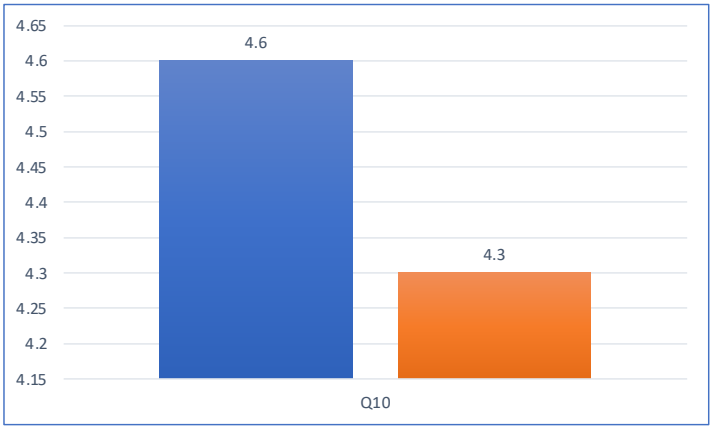

Figure 11. Significance of Spousal Loss for Widows

Understanding what it means to be a widow and increased sensitivity to widows’ needs are at the core of this research. Participants’ responses to the question about a widow’s isolation (Q11) indicated sensitivity to widows' experiences and showed a 7% increase.

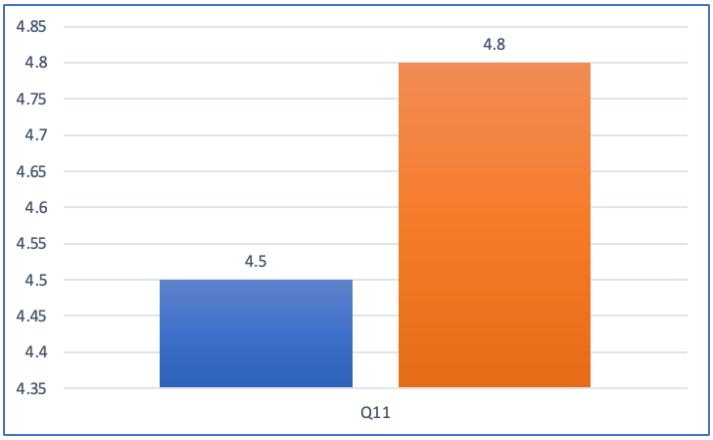

Figure 12. Perceived Isolation of Widows

Participants had a stronger awareness that widows are forgotten, misunderstood, and avoided. They saw society's discomfort with interacting with widows, coupled with the lack of understanding and lack of support, as contributing to the isolation widows experience.

The results of the last question (Q12), "I am aware of the ongoing needs of widows in the congregation," displayed in Figure 13, show a -0.5-point change in the pre-post scores or a 12% decrease after the training.

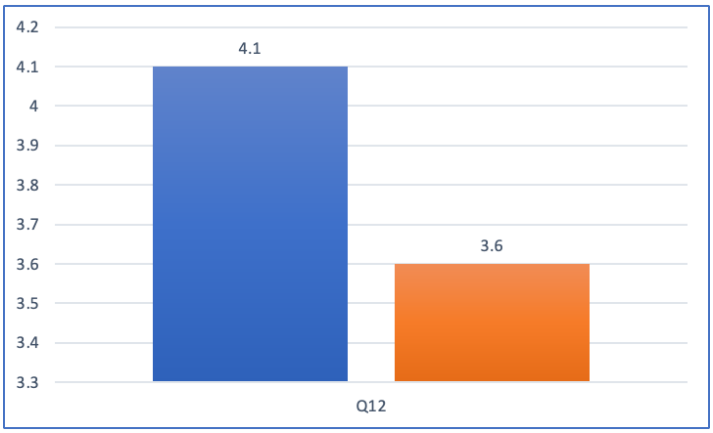

Figure 13. Awareness of Ongoing Needs of Widows

The qualitative responses post-training suggest a more informed, nuanced understanding. The decrease in post-scores more likely underscores participants' recognition of their limited knowledge before attending and a more cautious self-assessment rather than a decline in awareness.

The overall results of the six ministry leaders who completed both workshops demonstrate a positive change in their awareness and sensitivity to the needs of widows. The pre- and post-workshop responses reflect a 5% overall gain and suggest leaders became more informed, more empathetic, and attentive to the needs of widows in the congregation. Though the results are not statistically significant, they show a meaningful and practical positive shift. The upward trend across most questions indicates that the

training was effective in measuring the cognitive (understanding what it means to be a widow) and affective (sensitivity and awareness) experiences of the participants. The demographic question (Q14) showed no significant difference in the scores or responses between those over fifty and those under fifty. The data collectively support and affirm the project's hypothesis.

Qualitative Results

I employed three qualitative research methods to provide greater insights and a comprehensive understanding of the quantitative data obtained from the pre- and post-questionnaires. Details from journal entries, group discussions, and direct observations provided a holistic view of the participants' experience and the overall effectiveness of the workshops. The qualitative data received from the participants during the sessions and between the two workshops substantiated the quantitative results and affirmed the hypothesis. Discussion questions were asked in each session, and the summary of responses follows.

Discussion Questions and Summary

Session One – What do you expect to learn in the upcoming sessions? What new insights or perspectives did you learn about widows from the session? Participants were expected to learn about widows and their role in ministering to widows. They were surprised by the distinctions made between widows and widowers and were anxious to learn more. Several commented about widows being forgotten, invisible, and the loss of identity.

Session Two – What new insights or perspectives did you learn from the lesson on God and widows? What does "Plead the case of the widow" mean today? How does Isaiah 1:17 define justice, and why is it important today? Several participants commented that the Biblical references regarding widows significantly impacted them. They emphasized the seriousness of God's desires towards the marginalized, clearly mandated in the scriptures. Several commented on the gap that exists between the biblical mandate and the church's implementation.

Session Three – What impact do you think multiple losses have on a widow's ability to grieve and heal? What role should faith and the church have in the life of widows and their healing process? Multiple participants shared personal experiences with the loss of loved ones. Even those who were not widows were able to imagine and articulate the secondary losses widows experience. Participants discussed how pain can be transformed into purposeful ministry using Princess Joanna, a historical figure, as a model. All agreed that the church plays a crucial role in the spiritual healing of widows, but lacks in the areas of emotional healing. Several participants also acknowledged their personal lack of knowledge and the need for training in ministering to widows.

Session Four – The early Church shared everything in common. How can church leadership today adopt this principle to support widows? What kinds of involvement or support have you witnessed with widows in the church here or elsewhere? How do cultural or societal views shape the treatment of widows? All participants expressed that the information shared in this lesson on New Testament care for widows was new to them. They all agreed that the support the early church provided for widows was a model that could be adapted and replicated.

Session Five – Did the Apostles' response in Acts 6:2 trivialize serving? What are some of the fears and challenges that you believe widows might face that would keep them from participating in a support group? What does a community of support look like to you, and how would it benefit a grieving widow? The participants discussed creating a widow's support group and potential activities that would meet widows' ongoing needs. They mentioned meeting practical needs immediately after a spouse's death, such as providing meals, support during holidays, and long-term assistance, such as financial management. They also brainstormed on ways to meet the ongoing needs of widows.

Session Six – Based upon the teachings, what are your thoughts on establishing a community of support for widows, and what would it look like? Participants brainstormed ideas that included a cross-cultural approach, outreach beyond the local church, and partnerships with other churches, funeral homes, and community organizations. The group discussions were positive, productive, and thoughtful. Participants were free to opt out of speaking, but everyone was genuinely engaged, asked questions, and contributed to the conversation.

Summary of Journal Entries

There were guided journal prompts during sessions one through five, the journal prompts:

- Sessions One through Five: Write a journal entry on your initial thoughts, insights, perceptions, and feelings about the lesson.
- Session Two: How does the Bible portray widows, and what does it teach about how they should be treated? (Encourages participants to focus on biblical

perspective on widowhood, the widow's plight, and God's unique mandate concerning widows throughout the Bible.)

- Session Three: In what ways do you think the church can better support widows?
- Write a journal entry on your initial thoughts, insights, perspectives, and feelings about God's heart and the call to care for widows.
- Write an entry on your initial thoughts, insights, perspectives, and feelings about transforming loss through faith and advocacy.

Journal prompts were emailed in between workshops:

- What is God inviting you to do differently as a result of the first workshop?
- How has your thinking changed about widows' care?
- How has your perspective changed towards the vulnerable and the marginalized?

Analysis of participants' personal and guided journal entries revealed a significant deepening of biblical understanding, pastoral awareness, and empathetic engagement with widows' experiences. Participants consistently reflected on the biblical mandate to care for widows, drawing heavily on Isaiah 1:17 and James 1:27. These passages prompted them to consider their personal responsibility. Several noted God's explicit displeasure with worship practices that neglect the care of the marginalized, particularly widows, and emphasized the necessity of bearing one another's burdens. Participants demonstrated increased awareness of the multifaceted nature of widowhood, including layered losses, identity disruption, changes in social status, non-death losses, and signs of bereavement overload. Reflections indicated that the concept of widowhood extended beyond spiritual care to practical realities, such as financial management and daily living

skills, leading someone to recommend incorporating widowhood preparedness into marriage counseling.

Historical and ecclesial models, including the early church's order of widows and the communion of the saints, were frequently cited as instructive frameworks for developing contemporary communities of support. The example of Princess Joanna of Austria was particularly impactful, inspiring participants to note how personal pain and suffering can be transformed into compassionate service. Emotionally, several participants described feelings of personal grief being triggered when engaging with loss history charts, which was effective in heightening their sensitivity to widows' ongoing pain. Many acknowledge the importance of being present, listening, and avoiding harmful platitudes. They were happy to learn that asking widows directly, "How can I support you in this moment?" was sufficient to show their willingness to help. Overall, journal entries reflect leaders' increased awareness and sensitivity and support the project's hypothesis.

Observations

Based on my observations during both workshops, all participants felt safe and comfortable sharing their thoughts and asking questions after the agenda and objectives were covered. Initially, they seemed tentative, but once they understood the expectations of their role and the anticipated benefits of the research, they were less apprehensive. The participants had a history of serving together in ministry, which contributed to their visibly relaxed demeanor. During the lectures, activities, and group discussions, participants' body language conveyed a sense of connection and inclusion. The

participants' non-verbal behaviors provided cues indicating they were attentive, highly engaged, and emotionally invested throughout every session. Participants were receptive to new information, nodding in agreement, and they shook their heads in disbelief as they learned of the challenges and concerns widows face. Participants maintained eye contact, leaned in to listen, took notes, captured screenshots of slides, and displayed contemplative facial expressions, particularly when sensitive subjects were covered. Notably, while the focus was on widows' multi-layered losses, participants were observably moved to tears during the discussion on bereavement overload, and while charting their personal loss history graph. By the conclusion of the workshops, participants were smiling, energetic, empowered, and ready to embrace their role in the lives of widows. These observations are borne out by the outcomes and comments in the end-of-course evaluations that participants completed.

Course Evaluation Results

The overall effectiveness of the two-part workshops was measured by participants' feedback from the course evaluation. The evaluation comprised three open-ended questions and eight five-point Likert scale questions. Space for additional comments was also available. The qualitative comments helped clarify any ambiguity or potential misinterpretation of the quantitative data in the project. Below are the three open-ended questions and a summary of the group's responses.

Q2. What did you find most impactful about the workshop? Many of the participants found the scriptural components most impactful. Several references were made to the teaching on Isaiah 1:17, the biblical foundation scripture, and the discussion

that followed as being the most impactful to them. They stated it helped them understand the God-given mandate and the church's responsibility to care for widows. Some found the exercise on secondary losses and the historical timeline of losses eye-opening.

Do you feel your awareness of widows' needs has increased? If so, how? All participants reported that their awareness, sensitivity, and understanding of widows' unique needs increased. Have you become more sensitive to the challenges widows face? If so, how? Participants overwhelmingly stated their sensitivity to the challenges widows face increased. Knowledge gained from the biblical examples and discussions of widows' lived experiences was cited as a key factor in their increased sensitivity.

The responses for questions one, five, and six through eleven were based on the Likert scale. All participants selected Strongly Agree or Agree for each question, reflecting a high degree of satisfaction and perceived value of the workshops. The top two Box scores represent the combined percentage of participants who selected Agree or Strongly agree. All eight questions achieved 100%, indicating the participants' unified affirmation of the workshops' effectiveness and success. The questions and the breakdown of the top two box scores are shown below.

Table 7. Participants' Course Evaluation Feedback - Top Two Box Scores

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Total Participants	Top Two Box %
Q1. I understood the workshop goals and learning objectives.	4	2	6	100%
Q5. I feel prepared to apply what I learned in the workshops.	3	3	6	100%
Q6. The topics were relevant to widows.	5	1	6	100%

Q7. There was a good balance between secular and biblical teaching	4	2	6	100%
Q8. The content was organized.	5	1	6	100%
Q9. The facilitator was knowledgeable.	6	0	6	100%
Q10. The visual aids, handouts, and materials enhanced my learning.	5	1	6	100%
Q11. I would recommend this workshop to other Church Leaders.	6	0	6	100%

The evaluation results were overwhelmingly positive and proved that the overall instructional design, course content, and visual aids were effective, and the goals were communicated and understood. More importantly, the participants expressed confidence and readiness to apply what they learned. They found the workshop relevant and described it as informative, powerful, and transformative. They unanimously endorsed the workshops, and some highly recommend it to other churches, community groups, and even internationally.

Conclusion

This research study aimed to raise the ministry leadership's awareness and sensitivity to widows and their needs. The findings from the quantitative and qualitative methods validate that the objective was achieved and the workshops were successful. The cognitive change in participants' understanding of what it means to be a widow was measured through the percentage of increase in the post-questionnaire. The findings reflect an enhanced cognitive awareness, and the participants demonstrated a greater knowledge of widows, their needs, and challenges after the training. The affective change

was measured by participants' increased awareness and sensitivity as evidenced in journal entries, discussion notes, post-questionnaires, and observations. The findings imply a positive change in participants' understanding and sensitivity, affirming the hypothesis that if ministry leadership participates in a workshop about what it means to be a widow, then they will become more sensitive (aware) to the needs of those members who are widows.

This project taught me that I have been set on a God-ordained path that began with my lived experiences as a widow, detailed in my Spiritual Autobiography and outlined in my Ministry Focus. Each time I have shared my journey through widowhood and my project informally, it has been regarded as significant, necessary, and something most have never considered. Formally, conducting workshops with church leaders elicited the same reactions and confirmed that raising awareness of widows' care is a key factor in ensuring they are seen, heard, and understood. The leaders' awareness of widows' ongoing needs evoked empathy, which, in turn, led to greater sensitivity. What is not known or understood cannot be addressed, and that is a lesson learned from the project that helped me recognize that ministry to widows is essential; however, if the church is going to change its posture on caring for widows, the most impactful change must happen at the leadership level.

My journey from grieving widow to advocate, grief counselor, author, and researcher has been transformative, with each step building upon the last. This project revealed the next steps in my journey and my next level of ministry on behalf of widows. By continuing to raise awareness of widows' needs with church leadership, I hope to help them become sensitive and educate them on how to establish a culture where widows are

not overlooked or left to navigate their grief alone. Sensitivity and awareness are the first steps to developing a widow-to-widow-oriented model within the church designed to fulfill the biblical responsibilities to widows. The value of this research project is that it creates a bridge from leaders merely giving mental assent to their responsibility for widows' care to leaders being moved with compassion and willing to act, grounded in biblical, evidence-based research and practices. The project provides a roadmap to establish a structured ministry with a framework that includes peer support, leadership training, education, ongoing follow-up, and pastoral support and involvement when needed. This structured framework must be feasible, acceptable, and sustainable.

What Worked Well and Areas For Improvement

The overall flow of the workshops worked well. The content contained an appropriate mix of biblical and secular content, sequenced and chunked into concepts easy for participants to grasp. Experimental learning activities were incorporated and implemented where applicable. The quotes I interspersed throughout the PowerPoint on leaders and widows were an unexpected source of thought and organic conversation. One such quote, which generated discussion from Simon Sinek, says, "Leadership is not about being in charge. It is about taking care of those in your charge – especially those society forgets, like widows." I will consider using more quotes to solicit participant conversation, reduce the number of discussion questions, and consider adjusting the pace of the training.

In future workshops, I would also read and explain the rationale for the pre-questionnaire statements to the group to ensure the purpose is understood and to allow

time for participants' questions. I would replace group activities with individual team activities based on a larger class size. Another change I envision handling differently is the workshops' schedule. The two workshops were held on Saturdays, three weeks apart. Shortening the interval between them by one week would have been more effective. Retention of the information would have been improved, and the time to review the content covered in Part 1 could have been reduced. Enthusiasm and motivation did not seem to wane in Part II, but I detected a slight loss of momentum at the beginning of the workshop. Lastly, future workshops will include resources on grief and loss available to assist widows during their bereavement journey.

Opportunities for future research on widowhood and the church are vast because widows and widowers are one of the most overlooked groups in most churches. Faith-based widow care is under-researched, as is the impact of cultural, racial, gender, and socioeconomic differences in widowhood. Participants discussed establishing a peer-support group specifically for widows. Research examining the effectiveness of a widow-to-widow peer support group and its impact on Pastoral care, the congregation, and the community would be another potential area to explore. The opportunity also exists to examine the effect of widowhood on men in the church who are widowers, a topic discussed during the workshops.

APPENDIX A

PRE-SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

PRE-SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Unique Identifier #_____

<u>Instructions</u>: The following fourteen (14) statements relate to your knowledge and beliefs about widowhood. Please indicate the degree to which you agree with the statements.

1. I am aware of the specific challenges that widows face.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Explain your response: _____

2. I am comfortable discussing topics related to grief and loss with widows.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Explain your response: _____

3. I have a good understanding of what it means to be a widow.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Explain your response: _____

4. I know what the Bible teaches about special treatment for widows.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Explain your response: _____

5. What comes to mind when you hear the word widow? _____

6. I believe people have misconceptions and stereotypes about widows.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Explain your response: _____

7. The impact of widowhood is different for widows compared to widowers.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Explain your response: _____

8. Church leadership has a role in meeting the needs of widows in the congregation

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Explain your response: _____

9. I am sensitive to the needs of widows in the congregation.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Explain your response: _____

10. I believe the loss of a husband presents widows with more significant challenges than the loss of other relationships.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Explain your response: _____

11. I feel widows are isolated after the death of their husbands.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Explain your response: _____

12. I am aware of the ongoing needs of widows in the congregation.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Explain your response: _____

13. What is the average age of widows in the United States? *(circle one)* _49 _59 _65 _72

14. What is your age category ____Under 50 ___Over 50

APPENDIX B

POST-SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

POST-SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Unique Identifier #_____

<u>Instructions</u>: The following fourteen (14) statements relate to your knowledge and beliefs about widowhood. Please indicate the degree to which you agree with the statements.

1. I am aware of the specific challenges that widows face.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Explain your response: _____

2. I am comfortable discussing topics related to grief and loss with widows.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Explain your response: _____

3. I have a good understanding of what it means to be a widow.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Explain your response: _____

4. I know what the Bible teaches about special treatment for widows.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Explain your response: _____

5. What comes to mind when you hear the word widow? _____

6. I believe people have misconceptions and stereotypes about widows.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Explain your response: _____

7. The impact of widowhood is different for widows compared to widowers.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Explain your response: _____

8. Church leadership has a role in meeting the needs of widows in the congregation

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Explain your response: _____

9. I am sensitive to the needs of widows in the congregation.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Explain your response: _____

10. I believe the loss of a husband presents widows with more significant challenges than the loss of other relationships.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Explain your response: _____

11. I feel widows are isolated after the death of their husbands.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Explain your response: _____

12. I am aware of the ongoing needs of widows in the congregation.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Explain your response: _____

13. What is the average age of widows in the United States? *(circle one)* _49 _59 _65 _72

14. What is your age category ____Under 50 ___Over 50

APPENDIX C

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Session 1

Q1. What do you expect to learn over the next six weeks? Evaluation:

Session 2

Q1. What new insights or perspectives did you learn about God and widows?

Q2. What does "Plead the case of the widow" mean today?

Q3. How does Isaiah 1:17 define justice, and why is it important today?

Q4. Throughout your ministry experience here or elsewhere, what has been your experience interacting with widows?

Session 3

Q1. What new insights or perspectives did you learn from the lesson?

Q2. What impact do you think multiple losses have on a widow's ability to grieve and heal?

Q3. What role should faith and the church have in the life of widows and their healing process?

Session 4

Q1. What new insights or perspectives did you learn from the lesson?

Q2. The early Church shared everything in common. How can church leadership today adopt this principle to support widows?

Q3. Throughout your ministry experience here or elsewhere, what has been your experience interacting with widows?

Q4. How do cultural or societal views shape the treatment of widows?

Session 5

Q1. What new insights or perspectives did you learn from the lesson?

Q2. What are some of the fears and challenges that you believe widows might face that would keep them from participating in a support group?

Q3. What does a community of support look like to you, and how would it benefit a grieving widow?

Session 6

Q1. How have the workshops influenced your understanding of widowhood and the role of pastoral care?

APPENDIX D

COURSE EVALUATION

Unique Identifier #_____

COURSE EVALUATION FORM

Instructions: Your feedback on the two-part workshop is important and greatly appreciated. Please provide your response to the following:

1. I understood the workshop's goals and learning objectives.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Comment: _____

2. What did you find most impactful about the workshop?

_____

_____

_____

3. Do you feel your awareness of widows' needs has increased? If so, how? _____

_____

_____

_____

4. Have you become more sensitive to the challenges widows face? If so, how? _____

_____

_____

_____

5. I feel prepared to apply what I have learned in the workshops.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Comment: _____

6. The topics were relevant to supporting widows.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. There was a good balance between secular and biblical teaching.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. The content was organized and easy to follow.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. The facilitator was knowledgeable and engaging.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. The visual aids, handouts, and materials enhanced my learning experience.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

11. I would recommend this workshop to other Church Leaders.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Comment: _____

_____

_____

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

_____

_____

_____

THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING

APPENDIX E

WORKSHOP ANNOUNCEMENT LETTER

ANNOUNCEMENT

You're invited to attend a FREE

LEADERSHIP TRAINING

WIDOWHOOD: The Role of Pastoral Care in Establishing a Community of Support

Dear KCM Leader:

As a doctoral student at United Theological Seminary, I am conducting a research study as a partial requirement for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The purpose of my research study is to investigate the role of pastoral care in establishing a community of support for widows. As a leader at Kingdom Come Ministries, your participation in this study would be valuable.

The training consists of six two-hour workshops consisting of Biblical and secular teaching, group discussions, and other engaging activities related to understanding God's heart concerning leadership, widows, and ministry.

The workshops will be held:

- Saturday, July 19 and August 9, 2025)
- 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
- Kingdom Come Ministries Empowerment Center

As a leader, you are not obligated to participate; your participation is entirely voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time. If you choose to participate, please get in touch with me, and I will schedule a brief telephone interview to provide more details and answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Marquita E. Batchelor, BS, MS, MMin
Cell: (440) 336-4488 | Email: Marquita@MarquitaE.com

APPENDIX F

WORKSHOP FLYER

WIDOWS AND THE CHURCH

CULTIVATING COMPASSIONATE LEADERSHIP

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

July 19, 2025
August 9, 2025

9:00 am - 4:00 pm

Kingdom COME Ministries
Empowerment Center
241 Maple Avenue
Clairton, PA 15025

MARQUITA E. BATCHELOR
Facilitator & Doctoral Candidate

MUST BE 18 AND
MUST SIGN CONSENT FORM
Breakfast/Lunch Provided

For more information
Confidential Registration

440.336.4488
Marquita@MarquitaE.com

APPENDIX G

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Investigator/Facilitator Name: Marquita E. Batchelor, BS, MSPL, MMin
Contact Information: Kingdom Come Ministries Empowerment Center, 241 Maple Avenue, Clairton, PA 15025. Use 440-336-4488 or Marquita@MarquitaE.com, if needed.

Introduction: I am a Doctor of Ministry student at United Theological Seminary, 4501 Denlinger Road, Dayton, OH 45426.

Purpose: As part of my dissertation project and partial fulfillment of my Doctor of Ministry, I am conducting a research study on Widowhood: The Role of Pastoral Care in Establishing a Community of Support. I am using a biblically-based, psychosocial approach to conduct a two-day workshop.

Requirements for Participation: You are invited to participate because you are part of the leadership team at Kingdom Come Ministries. You are over eighteen years old, not a minor, not pregnant, not cognitively or mentally impaired, nor are you incarcerated.

Procedures: If you agree to participate in this project, you will be asked to attend two workshops that will be held on Saturday, July 19, 2025, and Saturday, August 9, 2025, from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at Kingdom Come Ministries. No financial expenses will be incurred on your part.

Human Subject Participation: All the participants must have consented to be in the study, and participants must be protected and treated fairly throughout the study. Women who are pregnant or may become pregnant during the study must provide a doctor's note for their safety since they are considered a protected class (vulnerable population) by the Federal Law.

Risks: I do not envision any serious risks associated with your participation in this study; however, a licensed professional counselor will be present in every workshop to mitigate any potential emotional or psychological discomfort. In the event of accidental data disclosure, there may be legal, financial, social, or personal implications. In addition, I, the researcher, will abide by my state’s mandatory reporting laws.

Benefits: Participating in this study increases knowledge and understanding of what it means to be a widow. Leaders are expected to gain a greater sensitivity and awareness of widows' ongoing needs and understand their role in providing pastoral care. Church leadership will gain knowledge that will provide the rationale and justification for implementing a support system for widows who are members. Leaders will possess biblical and secular knowledge about the care of widows that can be shared with other leaders and laity, resulting in widows' feeling seen and cared for.

Transferable knowledge: Participants will also learn about loss, grief, faith, and service in relation to other areas within the church, other churches, and the broader community.

A successful outcome could help reduce the marginalization of widows and promote the development of support systems within the church and the community. A successful outcome can motivate other church leaders to care for widows in their congregation. It could also provide a practical roadmap that can be adopted not only by Kingdom Come Ministries but also by other leaders interested in ministering to widows in their churches and communities.

Voluntariness: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. You can also stop participating at any time. Your decision to participate will not affect your membership or leadership status. If anything makes you feel uncomfortable during the study, please contact me directly in person, by phone, or via electronic communication. My contact information is at the top of this consent form. You can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions, and you will be able to withdraw from the process at any time.

Confidentiality: We will take care to keep your information confidential, and we will also ask you and all participants to maintain confidentiality. All surveys or questionnaires will be kept private, and I will be the only one with access to these documents. The conversations and the focus groups will be recorded and transcribed only with your permission. Any notes, recordings, or transcriptions will be kept private. I will be the only one with access to your information. There is always a small risk of unwanted or accidental disclosure. The files will be encrypted and password protected. Your name and any identifiable information will be replaced with a code. Your name will not appear in any publications or presentations. You can decide whether you want your name used.

Summary: If you have any questions about the study or your participation, please contact: Marquita Batchelor.

Signature: Signing this document means that you have read this or had it read to you and that you want to participate in this study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be mad if you do not sign this paper. Participating in the study is entirely up to you, and no one will be upset if you choose not to sign this document or change your mind later. You agree that you have been informed about this study, including its purpose, the reasons for its conduct, and the procedures to follow.

_____	_____
Signature of Person Agreeing to Participate in the Study	Date Signed
_____	_____
Researcher's Signature	Date Signed

APPENDIX H

WORKSHOP AGENDA - JULY 19, 2025

Widowhood: The Role of Pastoral Care in Establishing a Community of Support

WORKSHOP AGENDA (PART I)

SATURDAY, JULY 19, 2025
9:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Kingdom Come Ministries
Clairton, Pennsylvania

SESSION ONE: Introduction to Widowhood

05 minutes - Welcome and Opening prayer
15 minutes - Icebreaker Activity
10 minutes - Ground Rules/Expectations
05 minutes - Objectives
10 minutes - Distribute and explain confidential participant packets
20 minutes - Take Pre-Questionnaire
10 minutes - Workshop/Sessions Overview
10 minutes - Break
20 minutes - Widowhood and Why Widows?
05 minutes - Questions and Answers
10 minutes - Reflective Journaling

SESSION TWO: God's Heart Concerning Widows
10 minutes - Name That Widow Activity
35 minutes - Biblical Foundation - A Biblical Perspective on Widows
40 minutes - Lunch Break
10 minutes - A Biblical Perspective on Widows (continued)
10 minutes – Reflective Journaling
15 minutes - Group Discussion and Q&A

SESSION THREE: Transforming Loss into Faith and Advocacy
15 minutes - Grief, Loss, and Bereavement Overload
35 minutes - Historical Foundation (Princess Joanna, the Jesuit)
10 minutes - Break
15 minutes - Multiple losses and the role of faith in widows' life
20 minutes - Loss Graph Activity
20 minutes - Group Discussion
05 minutes - Summarize key points, p prompts for journaling, closing prayer

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